"Where there is no vision the people perish"

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The Poetry Review

BEHOLD THE JEW
The Greenwood Prize Poem

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BEHOLD THE JEW

For Walter and Anni Landau

I

JEW, I say—and in my heart
it rhymes with all the hunted things
that cower in brakes or die in reeds
of shattered breasts and broken wings,
so that upon the selfsame breath
I pray for Jews and driven birds
and badgers baited to their deaths,
and bulls that, with nor wit nor words,
must bleed for strutting matadors—
beseeching God for such as press
all night against the trap's steel teeth,
for otters slain for wantonness,
for foxes and for hounded deer
and all the creatures man pursues,
the blinded and the lamed, the scourged
and prison-fast—but most for Jews.

But most for Jews—for lo, the fox
has yet his lair, the bird her nest;
the hare can leap and love and play,
the coney is not dispossessed;
the hart hath sanctuary and shade;
only among them all the Jew
must run and run without surcease
by day and night the long year thro',
the baying ever in his ears,
the dogs forever at his throat,
and hard upon his heaving flanks
the Huntsman, thirsty as a stoat.

No pause, no refuge for the Jew;
no truce, no hope beneath the sky;
only the shambling flight that wins
nor space to breathe, nor room to die;
only a wilderness of grief
where come no rains, nor healing dews—

Wherefore of all earth's harried hosts
I beg God hardest for the Jews.

II

And yet I think that it should be
a proud glad thing to be a Jew.
I am a Gentile, but there are
yet names that thrill my being thro'—
names with the trumpets in their sound;
grave, bearded names, and names that wear
the fine embroidered linen coats,
whose God-anointed foreheads bear
the mitre and the holy crown;
upon whose hearts the Urim and
the Thummim blaze forevermore;

names of the mighty, names that go
with shawms and timbrels played before,
and loud hosannas in their ears,
and palms before their valiant feet;
names in the purple and the gold,
heard like a harp, played shrill and sweet;
great ragged prophet-names that cry
their woe and witness for the Lord;
the shepherd names, the patriarchs';
the names that pass with spear and sword
and chariots and riding men;
names that are rock and tree and well—
of judges and of counsellors
and captains over Israel.

III

And names brought nearer to my time
that are as music in my ear,
turning on my tongue like singing—
Mahler, Schönberg, Meyerbeer;
Offenbach and Rubinstein,
Milhaud, yea—and Mendelssohn;

Mendelssohn, who made his songs
of spinning wheels and bees, and on
an April day looked out and saw
the winter gone, the river free,
the new lambs white upon the hill,
the brown birds in the linden tree—

and in his gladness wrote it down
to bud and breathe and clap its wings
and spread green fronds towards the sun
for yet a thousand laughing springs—

. . . . . .

(Oh dearly I remember now
the mill-stream and the milk-white may ;
the little songs, too delicate
to bear the weight of words away ;
the lowly phrase that at his touch
broke into bloom like Aaron's rod,
or, taking silver pinions on,
fled upwards to the gate of God.

O for the wings, he sang. My heart
once leapt to join that soaring sound,
full-plumed for flight and ecstacy—
poor pitying heart, turned go-by-ground.

O for the wings—
Oh Bird of God
give praise for death, for where this day
should you find mercy's dwelling-place ?
How, maimed, rise up and flee away ?

No wilderness in all the world
but that the Fowler spreads his snare ;
no inch of all the firmament
but that his hawks hang hovering there—

O for the wings—
Praise God for death,
O Dove of Israel ! On this tide
yours else had been to pace the cage,
to pant and crouch, to peer and hide ;
to beat your breast to sorry rags,
to pile shame's ashes on your head ;
to weep your sad eyes blind, to cry
unanswered and uncomforted ;

to wail at midnight "O for wings !"
to groan at noon "O for the wings—"
to lie forspent and broken, past
all journeys and all journeyings,

your singing silenced, set at naught,
and all the loveliness you knew
befouled and lost and trodden down,
for that you were a Jew, a Jew—)

. . . . . .

Jew, I say again—
Like doves
the names come homing to my mind,
names of this hour and day, and names
that shine from years long left behind—
the poets' names, the wordsmiths' names,
names of the craftsmen who have set
truth on a printed page and laid
the world forever in their debt.

In clouds they come, in flocks they come—
my heart's wide cote hath room for all—
yet are they past my numbering.
I can but smile on them, and call
the loveliest ones—
Feuchtwanger, Zweig,
Yehoash, Toller, Bialik,
Werfel, Heine—
(Lord, here's wealth
beyond earth's dull arithmetic!)

Maurois, Golding, Pasternak—
the measure piles, the bin runs o'er—
Ehrenburg and Sholem Asch,
Proust, and many a hundred more.

Still, thick as stars, they crowd me in—
a host, a gleaming galaxy—
the names of men whom Beauty chose
to serve her altars faithfully;
Pissaro; Liebermann; and one
called Jacob Epstein—
and the names,
the healing names, of men whose deeds
shine out like steadfast candle flames
set in a room that else were dark—
lo, Erlich; Haber; Wasserman—

and names of wise men—
Einstein, grown
in understanding till he can
look over God's great Shoulder and
read in His Book the how and when
of time and space; of far and near.
And Freud, who knew the minds of men—
their mountain peaks, their jungle tracks
and swamps—and entered in and slew
the beasts that waited for their souls;

and gentle names as light as dew
that blesses fields at eventide—
of manna-bringers, prophets, seers—
Bergson, and one greater yet,
asleep for nigh three hundred years,
who polished lenses for his bread,
and with a sweet humility
took heart and soul and brain for rags,
and rubbed at Life till he could see
the Face of God, and in God's Eyes
his own dark face reflected back
and every face of earth beside;
and, filled with rapture, knew nor lack
nor poverty, nor pain, nor fear;
but only love, so great it held
all things created fine and dear,
with God in all and all in God—

Spinoza, sent as Christ, to be
a lantern to the wanderers' feet;
and, even so, cast out as He;
who, laid in dust, in a great voice
proclaims his testimony still;
and, shut from sight, yet stands for aye
a city on a radiant hill—

. . . . . .

Oh world, upon whose glittering breast
the great are gems of myriad hues,
reach for thy tiring glass. Behold,
how many and how bright the Jews!

IV

But Jew, I say—and lo, the word
lifts haggard eyes and looks at me,
great hollow eyes where sorrow drowns,
dark crystals in whose depths I see
the age-old shapes, the curséd shapes
of gaberdine and ghetto wall;
of rack and stake and gallows tree;
of whips and knives; and, with them, all
a newer hate can frame and bring—
the water cure, the firing squad,
the slaughter camps; the piteous vans
where souls must choke their way to God.

Jew, I say. The very word
falls slow and heavy as a tear,
as all the woe in all the world
were heaped and pressed and fashioned here
into a space three letters long.

Jew—It has the sound of breath
blown from a million whitened mouths
of men tormented unto death;
the shape and seeming of the groan
that splits the bursting heart in two;
the muted wail of winds that thread
the bared skull's sockets thro' and thro'—

V

Behold the Jew—from ancient time
a wanderer, an Ishmael;
scapegoat and man acquaint with grief—
these be thy names, O Israel.

The Chosen People, set apart;
chosen of God to breathe and dwell
forever in His Shadow—this
hath been thy portion, Israel.

But now and in this hour is come
a colder dearth, a sharper cup,
a heavier curse than any one
thy patient shoulders lifted up.

A Voice hath said, "The Jew shall die!
In his own blood his name shall be
wiped from the earth forevermore.
The Jew shall perish utterly."

VI

Shall this thing be?
Is he not man?
("Jud' ist Jude" they howled in Strasburg
when the year was green and new.
"Down upon all fours and crop
the grass as other cattle do!")
Hath he not eyes—?
"Yea, tear them out!"
hands—?
"He shall wear them to the bone!"
organs, senses, blood—?
"—to spout
until the Jew be drained to death,
until the less-than-man shall be
dried into dust and nothingness!"
Thus I have heard the Enemy.
But I have also heard my kind—
"Yes; terrible, of course"; they say.
"But Jews, my dear—Well, don't you think
they may have brought it, in a way,
upon themselves—?
I mean, they're slick;
sharp practice—and that sort of thing—
Shylock in Shakespeare's time, you know,
and nowadays Black Marketing—

"Oh, ghastly slaughter, I agree;
but still, my lamb, a Jew's a Jew.
Don't wear yourself to tatters on
a thankless job—"

I answer you—
shall England stand up, judged of men
by Brummy toughs, and Whitechapel?
Are Glasgow razor gangs the whole
that tongues can of great Scotland tell?
Is America the Bowery?

Nay. Nor are these men Israel.

No flock but has its spotted sheep;
no race nor nation but must own
some blemished sons, or if there be
let that one cast the foremost stone.

And even so, tho' Jewry's sins
blazed scarlet, I would stand this day
its pleader and its partisan.

There is, I think, no more to say,
except this last—

God, looking down,
sees Jew nor Gentile, black nor white;
nor atheist nor worshipper;
nor homeless men, nor kings in might;
but only His dear children, shaped
of His great Hand, warmed with His Breath;
His children, wayward and beloved,
to whom in Galilee He saith
"A new commandment here is given.
My little children, love each other."

Oh Jew, lift up thine eyes! Behold!
Oh Gentile, look upon thy brother.

VII

I have told you of the great Jews. Now
is time to tell you of the small—
the tailors and the sempstresses,
the men with shop and market stall;
the Cohens, Mandels, Rosenbaums,
the Levys, Josephs, Jacobsons,
the Morrises, the Weisenbergs,
the Goldsteins and the Solomons—
the little men whose like this day
are bleeding from the earth away.

I will speak out as I have found.
I will assay and prove the Jew
as I weigh other nations—by
the hearts I know, the hearts I knew.

I will bear witness, speaking with
a single tongue, in honesty,
telling, in naked words, the truth
and nothing more—God helping me.

. . . . . .

When I was nine, a timid mouse,
old Isaacs took the corner house.
He harmed no man; he spoke to few;
and that was all of him we knew,
except Ma Barrett said tho' she
had cleaned for gentry none could be
so scraped-particular as he.

Of course he ate outlandish things—
sour pickles and strange seasonings,
and vinegar, and oily fish;
and had his ways with plate and dish,
keeping the milk pan from the meat—
but there, it isn't what you eat,
quoth Mrs. B. of Princes Street;
what counts in Christian or in Jew
is paying when the bills fall due,
and soberness and civil ways;
not keeping Sundays Saturdays—
but working hard and putting by
a bit to keep you high and dry
in rainy days, like Mr. I.

. . . . . .

He fixed a coat for me one day.
I asked him what I was to pay;
"New cuffs," he reckoned, "pockets lined—
material for that I find—
cleaning, pressing and repair—
say two-and-sixpence, that is fair."

But clumsy-honestly I said
"The buttons—"
"True," he bent his head.
"The buttons—I forgot—and they
real mohair, very scarce to-day.
Good buttons, yes; how many?—three—"
He stroked each button thoughtfully;
he looked at them, he looked at me.

"You trying for a scholarship ?"
I nodded, flushed of cheek and lip ;
"Well, well," he said, "I hope you win.
The buttons—I will throw them in ;
And one day maybe you are rich,
you shall come back and I will stitch
a coat for you—a coat so grand,
with every little bit by hand ;
a satin lining, pure silk thread—"

"and mohair buttons ! Yes !" I said.

. . . . . .

But long and long before that day
old Isaac laid his tools away
and slept in Abraham, and I
was tearful, hardly knowing why ;
but prayed that night that it should be
remembered how he gave to me
three mohair buttons, fine and rare,
and asked that God should find a coat—
embroidered, sleeve and hem and throat,
a coat like Joseph's, bright and fair—
for Mr. Isaacs, Jew, to wear.

. . . . . .

At thirteen the Yedvabniks came—
Russian Jews—but all the same
young Reuben climbed a tree as well
as any goy, and when he fell
made no ado.
And Yetta, she
was all that seventeen should be,
gentle-natured, fair to see.
But Doris—Doris was my friend ;
open-hearted, quick to lend ;
strong and merry, gay and kind ;
with no backstairs into her mind—
all that she seemed she was, this Jew,
clear and water-sweet all thro' ;
dependable, and glad that you
would share, and play, and like her too—

I still recall the heavy day
when the Yedvabniks moved away.

. . . . . .

No Jews there were for ten years more,
and then I must have known a score—
Rachel, Sarah, old Maurice;
Leo and Sam, their families;
all affable, all smooth, all keen
on values, but at no time mean.

"Give me the Jews," said steward Kay.
"They like their kick-ups, but I'll say
that when they break a thing they pay.
Got a money sense they use—
This Club could do with some more Jews."

Jo was such a member. Jo
had come full thirty years ago
a slim young man from Germany.
He was still slim at fifty-three,
and hard as nails.

He loved three things—
our English orchard-blossomings,
and English pubs and English beer,
and last, and likely the most dear,
his violin. And sometimes when
the year moved to the spring again
he'd tuck it 'neath his chin and play
till bricks and slates dissolved away,
and grief was gone, and every scar,
and there had never been a war;
and hate was not, nor fear, nor care,
but there was singing, faint and far,
and every flower shone like a star,
and earth was new and Eden-fair,
and God Himself came walking there.

But there was more than that to Jo.
He had an axiom. "No, no, no!"
he'd fix you with a piercing eye—
"they will not mix—you must not try!
Sentiment and business, they
do not belong—they will not pay—
no, no!" a hundred times a day.
"It is the craziest of tricks!

I beg you, never, never mix
your business with sentiment."

I pondered Jo, the way he went—

His business I never knew,
but this I know and pass to you.
If Jo in office hours was hard
no calculation ever marred
his sentiment outside.
"We'll go,"
Committee always said, "to Jo;
he loves this place and he'll dig down,"
and dig he would, tho' he would frown
and lecture them for half the day
on making clubs and hostels pay.

He dug down for the roof, the floor,
the tennis court, the fence, and poor
old Kay's bi-focals; he was good
at any time we understood
to head the lists for such as found
hard going over stony ground.
No strings trailed from such givings. He
gave fully, freely, silently;
but later in the evening we
would hear from out the reading room
a fist thump down, a great voice boom
"You can't mix sentiment, I say,
with business. It just don't pay!"

And if new members grimaced, "Oh,"
we'd smile—"That's Jo," we'd say, "just Jo—"

That's all of Jo—excepting this;
Heimveh, mixed up with business,
took him in 1929
back into Aachen on the Rhine.
Yes, maybe that is all to know;
all that there is, perhaps, of Jo—

. . . . . .

Anna was a skirthand. She
remembered Poland fitfully.

Time keeps pace and pace with me,
but Anna is eternally
dark-haired and gay and twenty-three ;
these sorry days I find small trace
of Anna in my saddened face.
But then she was my mirror.
By
some mystery the Jew and I
owned equal inches, equal years ;
the same long hands and little ears.
Not the difference of a pin
between each nose and cheek and chin ;
deep eyes ; full lips, dark wing of hair—
each looked on each and found them there.

There was no bond. When Christ ran free,
a barefoot boy, in Galilee
the women of my household shone
with armlets from far Babylon,
and rubies winking red as fire,
and purple, past a king's desire,
that sailors, blackened of the sun,
brought down to Cornwall out of Tyre.

But three times thro' the centuries
have we mixed blood, no more. There is
a Spanish streak, a Scotch ; a clear
bright current out of Warwickshire.

Thus I am Gentile thro' and thro' ;
she was born a Warsaw Jew ;
but for some whim or purpose God
made us like two peas in a pod.

Our ways, of course, were not the same ;
she danced, lightfoot, and I was lame ;
her voice was shrill, her dress was bright,
her wit a thing of glancing light.
Life was her game ; but as for me
I went in all things soberly.

But in the half-light many a day
I'd feel a slap, hear someone say
"Oy, Anna ! Jimmy says he'll play,

let's try that step—Er . . Ada . . I . .
I'm awf'ly sorry !" And I'd sigh
"That's only four of you since tea.
This doubles game is killing me !"

But it was fun. I loved to see
her doing things denied to me,
wearing dancing slippers thro'
as tho' indeed she danced for two,
flaunting gaudy dress and scarf,
tossing, with that eldritch laugh,
her jangling ear-rings to and fro—

Yes, it was fun, twelve months or so—

And then they stood in groups and said
"That ill-lit road—a tram—she bled
almost to death, I heard—"
"They had
to amputate—both legs, my lad—"
"Remember how she loved to dance ?
Poor kid—poor Anna—not a chance—"

But I sat by myself and shook
and for a long time could not look
down at my feet, for wondering
if fate had gone a-blundering,
if the Dark Angel, fecklessly,
had taken Anna Marks for me,
and if indeed it should be I
and not my image who must die.

She should have died. She did not die.
She fought her way without a cry
back into life.
The price was high—
pain every hour, and now and then
the theatre and the knife again.
But still her wits went dancing ; still
her laughter echoed clear and shrill,
shaming the lesser-burdened there ;
and still a ribbon decked her hair.

And so she lived until the day
that they could cut no more away.

She knew. They said she must have known.
She laid an hour, dumb as a stone,
eyes closed, hands clasped and moveless. Then
she had them rolling once again,
miming songs and bits from plays,
wry limericks and doggerel lays,
and so it went for many days—
until one evening she said
her new red ribbon hurt her head
and as the nurse came to her side
made one last joke, and laughed, and died.

She was my counterpart. God send
I make, at need, as good an end.

. . . . . .

These Jews were of my yester year,
but there be others, now and here—
Selma, with her gentle dreams
of growing flowers, who stitches seams
behind a shop in Liverpool;
Fanny in a London school;
and two in distant Baltimore
who keep a cluttered backstreet store,
and serve, impartial, morn till night,
the Jew, the Gentile, black and white,
with pretzels, zwieback, candy, cakes;
cracker meal and T-bone steaks;
phosphates, colas, fruit-juice, shakes;
tuna, chowder, cheeses, grits,
sundaes and vanilla splits—
all cut-rate, excelled by none
you'd buy on Charles or Lexington.

"We could sit back," says Rose the Jew.
"We done what we set out to do;
the boys is fixed and qualified—
good doctors both—" he glowed with pride.
"We could go live upon the Heights,
but Momma says to me at nights
'There will be weddings one fine day,
and grandchildren—I guess we stay
for Abey, Lili, Solomon—
and maybe Benjy—Life goes on.'

She speaks the truth. She has her way,"
says Poppa Rose. "I guess we stay."

. . . . . .

And others in my mind there be—
Ernst stripped bare and forced to flee,
who in a new world patiently
builds up his broken life again
nor counts his wounds nor speaks his pain;
and Lew who, in a bitter day
when hope and faith had gone away,
and I stood shivering and afraid,
the day a Gentile, whining hymns,
had set me oleo and made
me fetch and carry to her whims,
called all his friends and made a feast
and set me—cast out and the least
among my own—at his right hand
as I were highest in the land,
and heaped my plate with meat and fish
and butter from a lordly dish,
and told me "Friend, your home is here,"
while Becky echoed "Come, my dear—"

. . . . . .

And likewise in this hour I see
tall Meyer, scheming, wild to be
in khaki 'ere his turn; and 'Man,
a last war's creaking veteran,
donating blood and telling lies
about his age, about his eyes,
to get back in the line; and Frank,
lord of a grey gun-bristling tank;
and Nathan smiling, strange and far,
this three months dead in Africa—

. . . . . .

Behold the Jew, in whom I find
no more of fault than lies within
the soul of any other man.
Thus do I cry; thus, sharp and thin,
half wavering before the mob,
spake Pilate in another day
of Christ the Jew—and left it there;
and washed his hands, and turned away.

But I can never leave it there.
If I keep silence all these things
are done of me and in my name,
and mine the guilt of bludgeonings
and massacres—
If I speak not—
if I forbear—I am as one
turned murderer. It is as tho'
my own hands bore the knife, the gun.

O Jew, my brother, 'ere that be
sooner would I run with thee,
wiping spittle from my cheek;
sooner—unaccustomed, weak—
labour with you, spade by spade,
digging in the gibbet's shade
our common grave; sooner sit
with neither fire nor sup nor bit,
watching thro' each dragging day,
my flesh melt from my bones away;
sooner die in Dachau's camp;
sooner feel the jackboots stamp
the earth upon my living face
than be but for a second's space
of those who ride to trample you.

Such is my heart towards you, Jew.

If I had gold, gold I would give you;
if I had land, land should be yours;
if I had strength of arm this day
I would make battle for your cause.

But I have neither gold nor silver,
nor any acres; corn, nor wine;
poor and frail and lowly, there
is but one talent I call mine.

One talent, yea. I have my words.
I give them to you, full and free;
will cry your name out without fear—
This will I do; thus shall it be.

I will lift up my hand for you
in all men's sight, where all men meet;

in market place and council room,
in country lane and city street;
on corners; by the cross roads; in
the valley; on the windy hill;
speaking your wrongs while daylight lasts,
and in the darkness fumbling still
up alleyway and court and yard
to find the rich, to tell the poor;
rattling the shutters till they come,
beating on gate and bolted door,
clamouring—while bloody drops run down
on lintel-post and threshold stone—
till men awake to brotherhood
and the Jew comes to his own.

VIII

While you read they die

Lo, now against
the eastern sky
an ancient people
nailed on high—
the old grey man,
too weak to run;
the maid, the mother
and the son;
the little babe—
newcome to breath—
smiling a small
fixed smile at Death.

In Pharaoh's hand
they faint, they die:
their blood cries with
a bitter cry,
"Is it nothing to you
passing by?
How long ere this
Red Sea divide
and we pass to
the other side?

How long, O Lord,
ere brother's heart
be moved to do
a brother's part?"

How long, I echo,
must they cry
and we stand futile—
you and I;
waiting, wet-cheeked
for Time to bring
the day of bloody
reckoning?

Vengeance never
freed a slave,
pity is dew
upon a grave;
but courage is
a sword to save;
mercy is
a lamp to bring
the driven to
safe sheltering.

Then let the gates
be opened wide!
(While you read
they die, they died.)
Let bitter need
be warranty;
let no man, faltering,
say "We be
too small and weak
a company."

God hath with
lesser tools than we
worked miracles
for all to see.
By faith ye shall
move mountains; yea,
and tyranny—

There was a day
when warriors paled
and armies shook,
and a young lad
stooped down and took
five little pebbles
from the brook—

ADA JACKSON.

ADA JACKSON, we learn, has for eleven years contributed verse and special articles to the *Sunday Mercury*. In addition she originated and wrote the whole of their children's corner. She has contributed occasional verse to the literary page of the *Westminster Gazette, Daily Herald, Clarion* and other periodicals. On the birth of a baby daughter she proposed giving up writing to devote the whole of her time to her baby. Fate willed otherwise. B.B.C. broadcast two of her poems in 1933. Methuen's immediately asked to see some of her work and as a result published *The Widow*; the Editor of *New York Herald-Tribune* Sunday magazine also heard the broadcast and bought American rights of many poems. Three other books followed, *Narrow Home*‹ (Cornish, Birmingham), *Against the Sun* (Macmillan, New York), *World in Labour* (Cornish, 1943).

The Editor of *This Week* claims to have paid her more for a single poem than has ever been paid to any other author. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt devoted a whole column to praise of one poem, "Two-Headed Penny." It was posted up in prominent places all over the United States, in picture houses, schools and churches. Saint Louis, Missouri, American Legion sent the author a resolution expressing their thanks. The Library of Congress, Washington, asked for MS. of the poem, which is now in their care, and Lockwood Memorial Library, University of Buffalo, have asked for methods of working and notebooks which they now use in their English course. Mrs. Jackson has read her own work on a coast-to-coast broadcast of the N.B.C. from New York. With and without permission, one poem originally used as her own personal Christmas card, "I Have Seen England," has been performed at hundreds of concerts for the troops everywhere. She dislikes publicity—known in U.S. as England's shyest poet. As guest of honour, N.Y. Pen Club Annual Dinner, 1941, her speech consisted of two words, "Thank you."

There are many economies I would willingly make before having to forego THE POETRY REVIEW. I want to express my deep appreciation of all that this publication is accomplishing in these days of stress and horror, nor do I fail to realise the difficulties with which you have to contend. Poetry is not a means of escape, a criticism frequently made by those who "cannot read poetry," it increases understanding and leads to ultimate vision, far beyond our present spiritual reach maybe, but one only grows by stretching. It is for this reason, I think, that true poetry never cloys. It is ever "the will-o-the-wisp to be followed but never captured" as one of your contributors so truly says:—MARY SEYMOUR VAN OOSTVEEN, W.8.

REPORT ON "THE SHIRLEY CARTER LEIGH GREENWOOD" POEM COMPETITION

There were about five hundred competitors and above a thousand entries, though no poet ought to have sent in more than one poem. Forseeing the hopelessness of the situation "Bellac" had the courage to start her verses with :

> Dead ! After a protracted illness
> painful as long—
> Starting with a few spasmodic aches
> that quenched all song . . . .

and R. M. H., with "Dear God, let me a cabbage be !"

There was a certain amount of satire, very little conscious humour, and a great deal of derived verse suggesting that the main favourites were Byron and Shelley, with a dash of Felicia Hemans, to say nothing of spasms and cabbage aches. Nevertheless, the modernists as influences were somewhat in the background. One lady, D. N. D., modestly elbowing them, sent in some original and vigorously constructed blank verse, but her handwriting, in places, was hardly legible, and her indignations so ill-restrained that she almost sounded like a fifth-columnist. Generally speaking, however, the war was treated from a patriotic or sacrificial point of view. But there was rather too much sentimentality, and even some display of the old clichés, so despite splendour of theme and an occasional good rhythm, many worthy poems were ruled out.

For a long time the winning poem was Corporal Herbert Corby's five-page "Pendle-Hill," a fine description of a wild country ramble in bad weather, the diction fresh and musical, and the epithets and general phrasing as felicitous as original. Rarely has the heroic couplet been so flexibly and variably treated (even some blank verse is threaded into it) and that feature alone might have proved a recommendation. But the poem was lightly jostled by a short lyric sequence, "Per Ardua ad Coelum," by one "Zero," which would possibly have defeated Herbert Corby, for it has an intenser emotional and intellectual impulse, and one of the stanzas is good enough to christen it for immortality.

> My will needs more than mortal strength
> To curb a heart that over-leaps ;
> She smiled and spoke, and Time lost length
> And Space its deeps.

But towards the end of the scrimmage a poem turned up which seemed to put all others in the shade, and though more than twice as long as what was wanted, was finally selected for the prize of £25. This is Ada Jackson's "Behold the Jew," perhaps too much of the nature of propaganda (for a poem) and incomplete in its imaginative range, since it chiefly sees only one side of the question, but nevertheless, a moving and convincing piece of work. Technically and structurally also it is very clever and interesting. It takes us back to the best things in the rhythm of Masefield's "Everlasting Mercy" and the poems of Ralph Hodgson (a very deft fusion of the two, though in no way a bundle of echoes) and the portraiture manner of Masefield's "Reynard the Fox." Most important of all, it is *living speech*. The writer is on fire with her subject and is in no way hampered by her literary admirations. Her phraseology is simple and exact without being threadbare ; and if she does sometimes beat an old tin-can, the noise rarely drowns the notes of her lyre. There are some exquisite touches in her poem.

Other poems which were set aside as possible winners are "To my own Youth" by H. W. Moore, "Roderick Dale" by W. R. Latham, "The Dinghy" by "Hazard," and "Avery" by "Albatross." (The two pseudonyms conceal well-known names in English poetry.)

"To my Youth," though a little threadbare in its diction and perhaps too reminiscent of Wordsworth, is alive with emotion and sincerity, and because of its firm clear music and many allusions to the present times is peculiarly suitable for the reciter. "Roderick Dale," the Byronic description of a murderer's last moments, contains some echoes (not quite all of them in inverted commas) from Shakespeare and Milton and Oscar Wilde; but it comes off, and technically is something new and original, for the pretended blank-verse adroitly conceals an internal cross arrangement of strange rhyming, assonance as well as exact (and much of it is exact). Hazard's poem, written in faultless diction, and even more heartbreaking in theme, is also a poem of last moments—those of a gallant and undefeated British airman. And Albatross's "Avery" (nearly as long as the winning poem), though weak in content-structure (it is pure narrative that waggles), is arresting because of its old-world sea-atmosphere and the virility of the blank-verse and general phrasing.

Other long or longish poems worthy of special mention are "Invocation ad Musam" by E. B. W. Chappelow, "The Sword of Victory" (a patriotic and fluent sonnet sequence) by Joan Arundell Gaved, "Poem of Acceptance" by Juanita Peirse, "The English Poets" by Rachel E. Boulton, "Life" by Miss H. E. Kennedy, "A Scottish Scene" by Arthur Ball, "The Derelict" by Scutator, "The Unknown Heroes" by Leslie Greene, "Battle Front" by Ken Etheridge, and "Lebensraum" by Edwin Scott. The most old-fashioned and out-moded in diction is E. B. W. Chappelow's poem (reminiscent of the classical period of Goldsmith's day) and the most modern in diction is Edwin Scott's. Somewhat shorter are "Skin-Deep" by Scorpio, "Francesca" by Audrey Adcock, "Let there be Light" by Frances A. Heneage Burkitt, "Apotheosis" by G. M. Hort, "The Hoof Mark" by Geoffrey Holdsworth, "The Pioneer" by Frank Higgins, "The Eighth Army" by S. C. Walker, "Refugee" by Irene P. Turner, "Pastoral" by I. M. Worth. To these must be added two poems of Christian resignation concerning women who have lost their homes, one of them clearly through bombing, and evidently personal—"The Untouched Dream" by Clarice M. Covell, and "Immortality" by I. MacLaughlin.

A few of the above poems are a little vague or unsatisfying as regards content, but metrically or verbally striking—at any rate in patches. All have something in them which drew the attention. "The Pioneer" is especially good.

Big bunches of short poems, many of them really good, were sent in by two poets who have already published books and made something of a reputation, *i.e.*, Douglas Gibson and H. N. Forbes. But each entry was too short or slight for a prize of £25, and the sonnets of H. N. Forbes (more cerebral than those of Joan A. Gaved) were not sufficiently relative to form a long poem (a sonnet-sequence). Other commendable poets who sent in more than two lyrics are Mrs. Dorothy Gibson, Joan Murray Simpson, A. G. Piggot, B. C. Windeler, Ethel Walker, Clarice A. Blakeley, Lancelot Julian Reed, Mrs. Audrey Adcock, Eric Wilson Barker (California), Frank Batchelor, Wrenne Jarman, E. R. Boulton, Alex Smith, Amory Leggatt and D. Woodcock. Something from each of them has been set aside for perusal by the Editor of THE POETRY REVIEW.

Most of the poems singled out ought to be published somewhere, as ought also the following short lyrics: "Triumph in Time" by Nicholas Moore (a shapely, bitter little thing, which sticks in my head rather more than some of them), "Companion to Cleopas" and "John at Gabes" by Nan Goodall, "Mountain Madness" by H. Howard Sergeant, "Her Infinite Variety" by "Tyro," "The Pilgrim's Barn" by Muriel A. Grainger, "A Bird Sang" by Margaret Horne, "Retribution" by Phyllis Lyth, "The Immortal Quest" by M. D. Cameron, "Posterity" by Gwilym R. Jones, "The Quest"

by R. E. Evans, "Night" by Phyllis M. Costigan, "The Beaufighters" by Major W. T. Shorthose, "Requiem" by Agnes Grozier Herbertson, "Pearl Harbour" by Hamilton Tovey, "Autumn Requiem" by A. Margaret Boumphrey, "Aftermath" and "Peace" by Judith May, "The Searchlights" by Signalman Eric Clark, "Still is the Night" by M. H. Tattersall, "Sonnet in War-Time" (satirical) by Paul Selver, "Bachelor at Twenty-Eight" by William Poole, "Awakening" by W. Lister Lumsden, "The Field" by Irene P. Turner, "Killed in Action" by Eleanor Norton, "Song of Age" by D. Woodcock, "Ivor Gurney" by M. Forbes, "Grieve not for Me" by M. Forbes Myers, "Remembrance" by E. M. H. Harington, "Lilith" by "Grey Monk," "Schubert Impromptu" by W. A. Rathey (d ftly pr cious), "The Marriage of the Oak and the Birch" by Kathleen Steed, "Water from the Well of Bethlehem" by Marjorie Baldwin, "Ode to a Skylark" by Joseph Ganley, "Autumn Mist" by Jean Addison Adcock, "J.w Bait.rs" by Driver Marg>ry White, "Rosurgam" by Evelyn Davey-C llins, "For Ever and for Ever" by Dorothy Gilman, and a poignant little thing called "Out of the Sun" by E. E. Tree.

A number of lyrics were submitted by children. Among these must be commended Marit V. Howes (aged 14) and Barbara J. Carmichael (aged 16).

There was rather too much unclear handwriting and general carelessness. Some of the typewritten MSS. contained strange errors, and the lack of self-criticism was occasionally deplorable. For instance, a short lyric by Ethel Walker, "To a Captured Nazi Airman," which might have been a "runner-up" for the prize, was not only mistyped in two places but most illogical in one of the lines. It began marvellously :

> Your eyes, like skies you fell from, blue.
> (Hers too, were blue, that see no more ;
> Blinded by you).

Then it went on :

> Fair, curled your hair.
> (Hers too, twixt dusk and dawn turned hoar).

I think it is the first time a poet has told us that white hair is naturally curly and that "fair" and "white" are synonyms. Another poet somewhat marred a fine lyric by an awkward homophone—"mourning." As immediately afterwards there is an allusion to a summer day and the sun setting, the word understood to a listener would be "morning," and not anything associated with "sorrow." Some of the most striking verse was strangely uneven. A moving lyric on a forgotten poet, Ivor Gurney (he is included in Sir John Squire's *Second Selections from Modern Poets*) contains this strong and memorable stanza :

> Pour out the wine and weep. He is forgotten.
> Dead are the lips where such sweet promise lay,
> The precious hour of youth thrown down and rotten,
> His singing mute, his music drained away.

But the opening and concluding stanza (the same) are not up to that level.

No doubt half-a-dozen good poems (though no top runners-up) have got into the rejection pile, for competitors did not always observe the rules of the game intelligently, making it difficult for any umpire, and I wasted a great deal of time chasing envelopes—which ought to have been always pinned on to the authors' manuscripts if they wanted them returned. Moreover, many of the sheets were not fastened together, and of one poem I have only found the peroration. The sorting out and reading of the poems has been a task of mingled pleasure and exasperation. But we can conclude that the competition has been highly successful, has fulfilled Mrs. Greenwood's intention and justified the offer of a substantial sum which we hope will be again at the disposal of THE POETRY REVIEW.

HERBERT PALMER.

POETRY, ANCIENT VERSUS MODERN —OR IS IT?

POETRY, the greatest of the English arts, is never "ancient" or "modern," save relatively, and there is therefore no dividing line between the two. At every period in the great continuum of the craft there has been, for that generation, the "classic" style in which they were brought up and the "modern" style of the latest school of which, because it was new, they generally disapproved. For the laws of poetry are laws of beauty, older far than man, and though there must be form to express the mood of thought that needs expression, the variety of that form is all but infinite, and must, if it be alive, for ever change with circumstance and the evolving mind of man.

We talk of prose and verse as if they were chalk and cheese. There is, however, no precise dividing line. On the first page of Yeats' *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* he sets out a passage from Walter Pater's essay on Mona Lisa, and sets it out as verse. T. S. Eliot's *East Coker* is magnificent English, but it is no more verse than Pater's essay.

Verse usually has metre, rhythm, rhyme (unless blank, which has laws of its own), uses poetic words, has definite form, however tenuous, and has at least some meaning to the heart or mind. Compared with prose it is more succinct, emotional and dramatic. It is in my view inseparable from song, whether the song be a love-lyric, battle hymn or dirge.

So much for prose and verse. Either may rise to the level of poetry, for poetry is prose or verse, generally verse, plus "X," the indefinable spark of beauty which all artists seek and mournfully few attain. "X" will light up quite poor verse, while impeccable verse for want of it may "flop." Poetry lifts, sings, excites the heart, and verse which fails in this may be splendid verse, but it is not poetry. As Roberta Shuttleworth has superbly said:

> The poet is hindered by these two things,
> The presence of feet and the absence of wings.

Into a world where all these matters were solidly established came Manley Hopkins, with forced and uncouth rhyming—"town did" to rhyme with "rounded"—and his famous "sprung rhythm," which always reminds me of the young man of Japan:

> who insisted that all verse should scan.
> When they asked, "Should it rhyme?"
> He said, "Not all the time,
> But it is most important to get into the last line as many syllables as you possibly can."

As Hopkins was more or less a contemporary of Henley it is interesting to see how the latter, without metre, rhyme or any particular verse-form

(From a Lecture delivered to The Poetry Society on May 28th, 1943)

wrote in *Margaritae Sorori* one of the loveliest poems of his time, proving on the one hand that these adjuncts are not necessary to a poem, and on the other it is unnecessary to be outré and absurd in one's efforts to avoid them.

Then came T. S. Eliot who, in his early stages, adopted an exaggerated plainness of wording and analogy, studiously avoiding anything approaching poetic usage or even verbal decoration. This school, for others followed his example, has been described as the nadir of the "grand manner" of the preceding century, but it is worth while to enquire whence comes this fall from the previous sublimity of expression. Does it perhaps reflect a fall from sublimity of thought ? In other words, was this but a periodic reaction to the excess of the previous period, or did it initiate a period when poetry was replaced by thought, and mundane thought in verse ?

By the outbreak of the last war the "new" poetry was becoming an established school, scorned, of course, by the "ancients," hailed, of course, with squeals of delight by a mass of dabblers in verse, but also by a few sincere poet-craftsmen, who welcomed an attempt to free the art from the trammels of the preceding age. By the 'twenties the flood was in full spate, and by the outbreak of the second world war it had become possible to generalise.

It seemed, then, if I may indulge in this pleasant past-time, that the day of the lyric, in the sense of song, was for the time being over. It seemed, too, that the joy of life was no longer an acceptable theme. Instead, it has been written, there was "social passion and a sense of suffering." But why "instead" ? Only fools ignore the existence of suffering and the needs of their fellow men, but is it a sin to write and sing of the other and truer side of the picture ? Clouds come and go ; the sun remains, and though sorrow may be the portion of the night, "joy cometh in the morning." Death is a fact, but so is life, and the inter-play of the two is of the substance of existence.

Again, Philip Henderson considers that in modern verse the "imagery of the modern world has replaced the classical tradition by a more courageous grappling with contemporary problems." But since when has it been the function of poetry to solve contemporary problems ? Must art be harnessed to utility to prove its worth ? Were the makers of Grecian marbles or of Chinese bronzes wasting their time ? I hold with Robert Lynd that "great poetry is not the expression of collective feeling. It is the speech of soul to soul." Let those who would solve contemporary problems speak in the market place or write to the Press until, that is, they learn that it is the mind of man that needs to be improved, not the outward circumstance which an evil mind has made. The function of

poetry is to open the eyes of the individual reader or hearer to the truths which the poet knows to be of eternal value; to perceive and enable others to perceive the beauty to which their eyes were blind. I object to the "realist" school of war-poets, those of the "mud and blood" descriptions of its horror. It is not glorifying war to express its heroism, patient suffering, and the all but incredible self-sacrifice of neighbour to neighbour which it seems that only the horrors of actual war can bring to the surface in the "average" man. Wars pass; the nobility of the human mind remains, and the poems of war which will live on are those of intrinsic beauty which tell of the intrinsic beauty of the human mind at its best, not of the beastliness of war conditions at their worst. I still regard Rupert Brooke as the greatest poet of the last war, and none has equalled him in this.

I may be sentimentally senile, but are not most of the "moderns" painfully intellectual? Is love demodé as a theme of poetry? There was a time when Christina Rosetti's exquisite "Remember me, when I am gone away" was the pattern of a perfect poem. Are there none living who could revive that beauty, or is love, in the modernist mind, a matter of sex and convenience?

But these are debit items. On the credit side it must be honestly accorded by the "ancients" that if there is a general loosening of form and lowering of intensity of feeling there is also, generally speaking, a greater sincerity. Modern verse has less style and is consequently, to its loss, less memorable, but there have been discovered a series of most interesting new verse forms, including half rhymes, consonantal rhymes and "sprung rhythms" of various kinds. But form there must be, and Ezra Pound, for example, who tried to express the rhythm and flow of life in words, inevitably failed when he tried to exceed the laws inherent in his medium. For the strength and direction of a river are conditioned by its banks. But for the limitations of its banks, which give it form, it would be a still and static lake. And the form must evolve from the life of the thought or feeling, which is what no doubt Rostrevor Hamilton had in mind when he spoke at the Laurence Binyon memorial meeting of "the nobility and dignity of the classic style compared with the artful and artificial undress of to-day."

Is modern verse more "realistic," as is claimed for it? That depends on what is meant by reality. To the poet, only the ideal is true, and the realism which finds its values in the miseries begotten of our unillumined minds should be left to the cynic and the scientist. The poet sees the shadows and sees them as such, but he never loses sight of the sun, whose temporary absence gives them birth. As never before the world to-day needs vision, and it is the poet's task to supply it.

Yeats has said that the modern poets "seek the unchanging beyond change." So do all artists, until they learn that there is nothing changeless save the law of change. For life is flow, and to stop is death. Life is a river, and none may take a handful of the river and call it his, for the water in his hand will die, as "river," while the river will pass him by.

As in every period in our poetic history, the innovators were plagued with a horde of witless followers who, lacking the genius of the original, copied the form or formlessness without the informing life which gave it meaning. These foolish ones played tricks with words for the sake of shocking, and emptied the feeble thoughts and feelings of their silly little minds without any sense of craftsmanship or mastery of their craft. Their only value is that an analysis of the failure sometimes gives a clue to the success. Dali's surrealism in picture-making, for example, was at first unique, at least in modern times, but his followers' work had so much in common that one wonders whether all alike were examples of certain undigested contents of the unconscious mind being projected on to canvas by the maladjusted artist. If this be so, it shows why their artistic value was nil, for they seldom touched the level of the racial, still less the archetypal unconscious, and therefore had no meaning or value to the beholder. In pictorial as in the poetic art, the public take no interest in young men being psychically sick for all to see. Not that I advocate that poetry should never transcend the limits of intellectual understanding. It has rightly been described as a balance between mere madness and mere sanity, and to say of a poem that it is nonsense does not necessarily imply that it is untrue. It may be non-sense because it is super-sense, that is, beyond the limited range of the thinking mind to understand. For sense is only so much truth as may be confined in the straight-waistcoat of logic, and the poet is a poor creature if he cannot move in higher realms than that. It is the poet's task to use and develop in others the use of the intuition, which is a higher faculty than thought or feeling, and it is on this level alone that poetry, as distinct from pedestrian verse, must be judged. Those who have wedded themselves to a strictly limited range of forms have no right to judge a newer set of forms at the level of form. They must learn to lift their critical faculty to the level of the life which has impelled the birth of the new forms, and it is only from such difficult but not impossible bases of judgment that "modern" verse or any other form of art must be judged. Let us at least assume, in proper humility, that those who create new forms have felt the need for such creation by reason of pressure of new feeling and new ideas. Study the new point of view, the new range of feeling, and then see whether or no it be the stuff of poetry, and whether the new form is a necessary vehicle for its appearance in the world of men.

From such a hill of vision one sees the ever-ageing and the ever new behind one and before. There is the same continuum of English poetry, with the accepted and established giants of the past forever sure of their worship and remembrance, and the figures of the present and immediate future moving forward on the long road with, let us assume at least, the same sincereity. As T. S. Eliot wrote in *East Coker,* with the humility of the great artist :

> So here I am . . .
> Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
> Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
> Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
> Is a new beginning . . .

So long as we are ever beginning anew we are alive ; it is only when we stop that we die.

CHRISTMAS HUMPHREYS.

THE GOLDEN ROSE

(To St. Francis)

FRANCIS, I would be counted one
Among the proud who know the sun,
The ecstasies of spirit, those
Who wear the holy golden rose ;
Who hold the secret of a heart
From sleep and from the world apart,
Aware as in eternity ;
Saint, for friendship pray for me
Who have lost the power to race
The wind, to rise white-winged with Grace,
And imperturbably abide
Where the remote ger-eagles ride.

This is our fault to-day who live
In England : we can no more give
The intense day of vivid soul ;
No beam may penetrate the dull
Interminable grey twilight
That is neither day nor night.
Hear, Francis ; pierce our hooded land
With blazing swords in a fiery hand ;
Brand our lethagied souls with Grace
That we may rise again to race
The wind, and justly walk with those
Who wear the holy golden rose.

JOSEPH GERARD O'CONOR.

CONTINUITY

THERE is no isolation in the links
That bind life's chain; but what has been will be
Even as now it is, a vital part
Of the great problem of eternity.

Years pass, toils gather, troubles fall on us:
There is love's way, which whoso takes may tread
Fearlessly, knowing that the time to come
Will treasure what the aging past hath shed.

And then, still groping for a present sign,
Stretching forth tremulous hands, we see at last
Pierce the dark curtain of the veiled to-be
Some mystic influence from the dim-lit past.

Years pass, toils gather; but a steadfast love
Still lights the watching eye with fervent fire—
Faith in essential oneness leading on
One great intent—to labour and aspire.

PATRICK RAMSAY LAIRD.

THE TREES REMEMBER

ACROSS the plain the sombre hills are waiting;
Their melancholy heights, austere, unfriendly,
Answer the stars' bright signal-fires with silence.

Silent each stony ledge, each craggy summit,
Silent the circling forest; only a whisper
Comes from the trees to tell of understanding.

Of understanding? Infinite compassion?
Surely the trees remember, and are weeping,
For underneath their boughs we walk together;

Walked, as in futile dreams again I wander,
Where once, through trembling leaves, the moon's clear silver
Shone on our first embrace. Now, broken heart,

Break once again! Then let your molten anguish
Harden to stone, stifling all pain and longing—
Oh, the sad years, the solitary years!

Across the plain the sombre hills are waiting
The punctual dawn's brief accolade of beauty,
Watching my tears in cold, incurious silence.

Richmond, Va. MARY COLES CARRINGTON.

BIRDS

THE sun shines down on birds, dead birds or live
Birds, kicking, running, sun upon their feathers ;
Throwing off cold left from more bitter weathers ;
The chicken in its fancy, and the heron
Perched on one leg in a wild running water :
For these the sun shines that they too may live.

O bittern booming, bitter in the marsh,
We have forgotten. Gorse, and fern, and berry
Are lost upon the thongs of war, while merry
Weathers leave us, and we are frozen in
The turmoil of our times. Better the gay
Sun on the chickens than this slimy marsh.

They run and scratch and pout. Like fine old women,
Fluffing their furs, jerking their heads to gossip.
With feet of steel they scratch the primrose blossom
And kick the plants in frenzy for a meal.
The cock strides in among them. It is he
To whom they are pertaining—servile women.

Bittern and heron are but lonely birds
Above the marsh, above the tall firs flying
For whom the shooter seeks not. In their dying
They leave no cackle nor a feather fallen.
Forbidden to the gun, only men's eyes
May look and wonder at these solitary birds

Nor does the shooter seek the pretty hens,
The vain and futile myrmidons of farmyards,
But lusty wives wring necks, and then the barn dance
Is over for them—No more cocks to run from.
The sun shines and the birds run. O, forgetting,
Amid such times do we look long at hens ?

Live birds or dead, we have what use for them ?
Ducks, buzzards, skreeking petrel on the seas
Are now but fancies for our memories.
Golden and silver pheasants live in zoos ;
Children, we watched them : now, grown older, we,
Hunting ourselves, have no more use for them.

Wives, fathers, mothers—prettiness in birds,
The sun on feathers, and the foot that scratches,

Running among the corn or over marshes
Hanging on pendulous wings, what mean these things ?
Let us look up wild history, and never
Forget the habitat and shape of selfless birds.

NICHOLAS MOORE.

HORSE — OLD

WHAT is the vision, old mare,
Mirrored in eyes gentle and fearful and bold,
Burnt dark with the centuries' pain, that stare
With their timeless patience, and all the wondering pity
Of the very wise—and the very old ?

Do you ponder the storied past
With its turmoil and toil : the war-cry—the bugle—the sweat
Dark-staining the quivering flanks—death's last :
Or those days—life's best—in the wind, the rain and the sun,
Serving the soil—as you serve it yet ?

Or are you drained of all sorrow ?
Do your sere eyes behold a vision of splendour, of wonder ?
Is your wide-eyed dream of the world of to-morrow—
Of the happy fields ; of the brave, sad, epic tale
Of your race all told : of the yoke asunder ?

G. A. SQUIRES.

WATCHING

THERE is no night, no rest, no damson dark,
No plush and summer dusk to hide our ways,
No slipping off of light to let the lark
Sleep in the grasses dim and dream new lays ;
No winter grove is there for bird or beast
To hoard the simple treasures of the shy,
No closing in of cloud against the east,
Suns are forever staring from the sky :
Suns to make common dust of ancient stone,
To prise all well-knit lives and loves apart,
To make the hallowed and unknown thing known :
Tempests of light to rend the forest's heart.
Watchful as hate we stand, O night fall soon
And end this shadowless eternal noon.

WALTER BUTTERWORTH.

A POET AS AUTOBIOGRAPHER

EDWIN MUIR is perhaps known best as a translator, in collaboration with his wife, Willa Muir, of Franz Kafka and other writers, next as a literary critic, and lastly and to a much smaller audience, as a poet. Everything that comes from his pen is marked by sensitiveness and integrity. It seems likely that his enduring work will prove to be his poetry. Slight in volume as yet, it is little known, and in his native country hardly known or appreciated at all. It is not passionate, not dramatic, not erotic, flows uniformly, for the most part, in simple metres and in classical moulds. It is at all times serious and reflective, without admixture of wit, or of conceits, or of humour.

Its quality, the quality that may make it endure, lies in its metaphysical and psychological content, which is as complex as the form that frames it is simple. Its themes are the everlasting problems of time and change, of personality, of infinity and immortality, of the duality or contradiction between the apparent and the real. These problems will not be solved by reason, for the human mind that would be easy to solve them is itself part of the problem; the dancer is indissociable from the dance; but a partial light is constantly being shed on them, often from strange personal angles, in the experience of everyone. To be deeply aware of such problems, to be able fitly and imaginatively to illustrate them in poetry, is to have achieved something that will pass unscathed through the changes of fashion.

The two special themes that recur, like subject and counter-subject interwoven in a fugue, through all the later poetry of Mr. Muir are the seeming contradiction between appearance and reality, and the nature of time and change. Of course these problems are essentially the same; but it is the second that specially obsesses him. His *Variations on a Time Theme* (1934) are entirely devoted to it, and in his *Journeys and Places* (1937) the dilemma is extended, as it were, from Time to Space-Time:

> The ghastly thin anatomy of Space Time
> Stripped to the nerve,

as he had called it in the earlier book.

We here briefly survey his autobiography. Its title, *The Story and the Fable,* is characteristic of the duality we have just mentioned. The "Story" is his outward life as it might appear if viewed, so to speak, at the surface of the earth; the "Fable" is its symbolic counterpart, the inward life that to Mr. Muir is the more real. This inward life is depicted by dreams, which are recounted in some detail and evidently regarded as important.

The "Story" is interesting for its own sake, though its later parts might not have such intrinsic interest for one who did not know the poet or his work. Born in 1887 in Orkney, the author spent the impressionable years of childhood on a farm in the small, treeless island of Wyre. In

simple and unaffected but sharp-etched language he describes the experiences of this early time, when the "Story" and the "Fable" were one, undivided as yet by the stresses of adolescence ;

> Ere from my wrist Time's bird had learned to fly,

as he wrote in the "Variations." A single quotation, the picture of his father sowing grain in the spring, will give the quality of the writing :

> When the grain was finished he stopped at another sack and went on again. I would sit watching him, my eyes caught now and then some ship passing so slowly against the black hills that it seemed to be stationary, though when my eyes returned to it again I saw with wonder that it had moved. The sun shone, the black field glittered, my father strode on, the fan-shaped cast of grain gleamed as it fell and fell again ; the row of meal-coloured sacks stood like squat monuments on the field.

This first long chapter, of childhood and the life of the islands, is perhaps the best of the book. His father went later to the mainland of Orkney, near Kirkwall, farming bad, undrained land, which broke his spirit and his health, so that giving up in despair this unequal struggle against Nature he made the decision, when Edwin was thirteen years old, to remove the whole family to Glasgow. Here, in quick succession and in painful circumstances, father, elder brothers and mother all died. Edwin, beginning as an office-boy in a law office, moved slowly upward among various ill-paid and uncongenial jobs, eventually finding himself (for with an *étourderie* born of indifference or inertia he seems to have applied for this job without first ascertaining what it was) in the office of a bone-charring firm at Fairport, where he stayed for two years. There is a strong contrast between Chapter I, the idyllic life in Wyre, and Chapter IV, the streets and factory and trucks of Fairport ; Mr. Muir does not spare us much, not even the exhalations. During the war of 1914-1918 he was back in Glasgow, in a shipbuilder's office. He underwent at various times religious conversion, enthusiasm for socialism and an attraction towards the writings and ideas of Nietzsche. In 1919 he married Willa Anderson, "the most fortunate event in my life."

From that time his life changed. The Muirs went to London, where Edwin became assistant to A. R. Orage in *The New Age,* did dramatic criticism for *The Scotsman,* and occasional reviewing for *The Athenaeum ;* entered, in fact, the literary world, and as a professional. The "Story" closes with an account of two years spent in Prague, including a short interlude in Dresden. This was in 1922. "I felt," he writes in the Preface, "that I could not write with any degree of clarity of later occurrences ; they are still too close to me." He does append, however, a Chapter VII in the form of "Extracts from a Diary, 1937-39," but to our mind this appendix destroys the symmetry of the book, and should properly have been relegated to a future instalment of the "Fable."

So much, then, for the "Story," of which the above is a very bare outline. The "Fable" underlying the "Story" is of even greater interest (though perhaps not to all readers) as affording clues to his poetry. One reader at least, the writer of this review, took up this autobiography with a certain quest in mind, that of discovering roads to Edwin Muir's particular Xanadu. We know, from the research of Professor Livingston Lowes, that *Kubla Khan* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* distilled almost line by line from Coleridge's reading and experience. To construe Shelley's emotional autobiography one has merely to read *Epipsychidion*; the names are suppressed, but the clues are at hand, and all but one are transparent. So, presuming that casual images in poetry, appearing in some single passage, arose in general from the suddenly charged imagination of the moment, but that recurrent images came from some deep experience, we had often mused upon the dragon, the Sphinx, the word "heraldic," the towers and the little hills. This, for example, from "The Mythical Journey," in *Journeys and Places*:

> Only the little hills,
> Head-high, and the winding valleys:

and this, from "Holderlin's Journey":

> The morning bells rang over France
> From tower to tower. At noon I came
> Into a maze of little hills,
> Head-high and every hill the same.

Whence these little hills? And whence these dragons?

> Did I see there the dragon brood
> By streams their emerald scales unfold,
> While from their amber eyeballs fell
> Soft-rayed the rustling gold?

Something reminds us here of Blake, and we recall how Blake, as his wife sometimes complained, used to live more constantly and intensely in "Heaven," in fact in his particular Xanadu, than in the daily routine of life. That these images come from some deeply engraven experience is an idea that must occur to any attentive reader of *Variations on a Time Theme* or *Journeys and Places*.

A partial answer to these questions is that soon after his marriage and removal to London Mr. Muir, through the intermediacy of A. R. Orage, was induced to submit himself to a psychoanalyst. We may presume that he was then suffering from a type of deferred nervous breakdown, the aftermath of a long series of experiences, from the merely uncongenial to the tragic, affecting too sensitive a temperament. However that may be, the experiment of psychoanalysis was not pursued to the end, but was discontinued after several months, when the Muirs went to Prague, and though it is reported to have been successful one has the feeling that it

might well have been disastrous. It brought to the surface crowds of dreams, both of the waking and of the sleeping kind, and on pp. 189-193 is recorded as much as Mr. Muir can coherently recover of the central and most important of these dreams, a dream stranger than any in De Quincey, or than any of the mescal-induced reveries of Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, one or two of which are given in Mr. De La Mare's recent anthology, *Behold This Dreamer*. There is no space to describe this vision of Mr. Muir, which must have lasted through aeons of subjective time, but a few short passages may be quoted :

> I remember coming to what I thought was the green, mossy trunk of a fallen tree ; as I looked at it I saw that it was a dragon, and that it was slowly weeping its eyes into a little heap before it ; they eyes were like brooches, ringed blue and red and white, hard and enamelled, so that they tinkled as they fell . . . .
>
> . . . As it came near I saw that it was a fabulous creature with an armoured body and a head somewhat like the prow of a sailing-ship, the head being partly that of a woman and partly that of a bird . . .
>
> . . . When this waking dream, or trance, or vision ended I was quite well ; all my sickness had gone.

Here, indeed, we have come upon Edwin Muir's Xanadu, the dragon, the Sphinx, the heraldic imagery, and not far away we shall also find the little hills. Whether his dreams were correctly diagnosed by the psycho-analyst, or correctly interpreted by himself, remains a question. However we regard them, it must be admitted that they fructify, if they do not actually cause, his poetic inspiration. His images come from a dream-world which is not continuous, like that of Blake, but is intermittent, not to be summoned at call ; he does not visit it, rather it visits him at intervals, in its peculiar colour and strange dimension of contemplative experience. It may visit him again, and then we shall have more symbolic poetry, with further advance ; that is, unless the present catastrophic war sweeps away for the time being all exercise of the living spirit and imagination. Meanwhile, this autobiography, so different from the usual, has permitted us to discern the lineaments of one who, but for partial frustration, might be a mystic ; one who believes in immortality, but cannot integrate into the aspect of eternity the sections of time visible at any instant, the living, spawning, changing, struggling world we see around us.

. . . . . .

POSTSCRIPT : THE NARROW PLACE

The above was written soon after the publication in 1940 of *The Story and the Fable*. Quite recently a new volume of thirty-four poems, *The Narrow Place* (Faber), has appeared and has already been variously appraised. It calls for some consideration here.

The Narrow Place itself, the poem of the title, belongs in mood and form to *Journeys and Places,* and falls naturally somewhere among the

nine places that conclude the earlier book. "The Recurrence" recalls "The Road":

> that turning always
> Cuts off the country again

and "The Wheel" is a further *Variation on a Time Theme*. Once more, though fleetingly only, we meet in "The Human Fold":

> The dragon with his tears of gold,
> The bat-browed sphinx . . .

On the whole one feels, though it may be premature to judge, that none of these poems has the intensity and imaginative empathy of "Holderlin's Journey," perhaps the most characteristic of all Edwin Muir's poems, and that Xanadu has receded. On the other hand, in the war-inspired poems, "The Wayside Station," "The River," "The Refugees" and "The Guess," we have the sense of something new, a milder mood, a relaxed tension, a wider dispersal of interest. The poet who nine years ago saw:

> The infidel congregation of mankind
> Flap sullenly upon the grinding storm,
> Slow-motion flight over a bottomless road,
> Or clinical fantasy begotten by
> The knife of demon Time the vivisector
> Incising nightmares

can write, in the last six lines of the present volume:

> Oh give me clarity and love that now
> The way I walk may truly trace again
> The in eternity written and hidden way;
> Make pure my heart and will, and me allow
> The acceptance and revolt, the yea and nay,
> The denial and the blessing that are my own.

CRAIG SAUNDERS.

CALAIS, MAY 27TH, 1940

> Oh blessed bird that should an ending sing
> To England's poem written with her blood
> On Calais' earth one ever living spring,
> Oh nightingales, sang you in pity's flood
> That men should die to sun and English rain,
> To mists and light and the still care of sleep,
> Exchanging all of love for searing pain
> That some man's son true heritage should reap?
>
> We had forgotten Flanders' scarlet flowers,
> The sweat and choking gas, thick drowning mud,
> The greater love, and bitter waiting hours,
> Defeated victory stiff yet with blood;
> Oh nightingales, shall we forget again
> The song of life bequeathed by dying men?

MARY SAVIDGE.

TWO POEMS FROM NORTH AFRICA

I

A late wanderer I, on a war-time eve,
Crept to the midnight church,
A delinquent renegade Christian man,
To drink the Blood of the Lamb.

I the so-called warrior-man,
The would-be killer of men,
I the foul-voiced pagan sot
A bully, a craven soul.

But the evening carols over the air,
Softened my ill intentions,
And the hardened heart and restive spirit
Were abased before the Lamb.

The Lamb that was slain.
The Protagonist, the mighty Actor
Slammed by nails on rough crossed boards
And daily killed by me.

Soften my heart, my emotions poignant,
Triste and saddened in sin.
I boldly seek the door of the church
To fling me right at Him.

And in the shape of Bread and Wine
I'll touch His lovely palm,
And loiter back up that long hill
Conformed from a way of sin.

II

"Sit still awhile and gaze,
And take it in,"
They say to me, the men with the long-pondering eyes.

I can't do that, the long view bores,
I can't look just for looking's sake,
Penetrate the meaning of the sight
By prolonging contemplation.

I see as much as ever I will
By a walking glance,
And the flying trip of a once regard.
I must not sit and analyse :
I cannot pause and meditate.

Life's ever a quick thing for me,
I've far too much to do,
And it isn't superficial
When I touch on a thousand sights.

The expanse of a scene, its analysed hues,
Its proportions and comparisons,
Need no reflection in a brim-full mind.
I can see hue and form and precise relations
In a glance, impatiently.

But I maintain that this world
Changes as the leaves shadows in the sun,
Is mobile like the petty waves,
And I can grasp it all in a swoop,
Then, perhaps, lie back some future day, if ever,
And in moments only, thrill at a memory,
Grading to new references, new regards,
Recalling briefly, and inventing
The gains others reap
By long-lasting thought and serious moodiness.

Sergt., R.A. DAVID JAMES DAVIS.

THE SPOTTED FAWN

The spotted fawn
In small, leaf-spotted suns was born
That dappled all his tawny back
Tattooing him with coins where he lay
Beside his mother's warmth the precious day
That showed him light,
Leaf-filtered, kind and green,
The day that played him tunes
With water-music washing over stones
And sweet, sharp, mingled semitones
From every tree,
The day he learned the feel
Of dew on grass,
Cool, cool
And wet,
Of sun that steals the dew with sudden heat,
And heard the fret
In wind-turned willow leaves and wrinkled pool,
The day that filled his breath
With pollened wind
And smell of bracken, earth and dell-deep moss,
The day he came to know
The strangeness of his legs,
The bulwark of his mother's side,
The solace of her pink tongue's first caress,
Her snow-soft belly for his sheltering,
The rhythm of his first untaught desires
For movement and for rest,
For food and warmth and nest
Of flattened grass to lay himself deep, deep
In moveless sleep.

PHOEBE RAYNER.

THE PIPERS OF EL ALAMEIN

From the crowded Libyan desert where the infantry in ranks
Break a way through opposition for the coming of the tanks,
I have heard a clamorous music that arises from afar,
T'is the shrilling of the pipers as they lead the Scots to war.
In triumphant exultation all the desert air it fills,
And the hearts of those who follow are snatched back to Highland hills.

They are brave men all who hear them and with bayonet fixed advance,
Stepping this way, stepping that way in the mazes of death's dance,
But what of those advancing who may come to equal harm
With the pipes upon their shoulder and the bag beneath the arm ?
With a proper Scottish swagger and a proper Scottish pride,
And the skirling of the music that still echoed when they died ?

They assemble at Valhalla and they say "Admittance please."
And Odin looks out fiercely and he asks "What men are these ?"
And they answer "We are Scottish ; from the battlefield we come,
And we ask to play our pipes here for on earth they now are dumb."
And Odin answers "Enter ! Join our heroes round the board.
Though your fealty be elsewhere, here the brave are in accord.

J. Sackville Martin.

DARK FIRES OF HOME

From the gaunt factory in Chelmsford
the girls abstracted from their shadowy movements
in the angry recesses of machinery,
ride, pure and steady, on their bicycles,
hundreds at once with supple, clever hands,
towards the lean doors and anxious fires of home.

L/Cpl., Sudan, M.E.F. Iain Fletcher.

G. H. Moore, an 18-year-old Ordinary Seaman on a battleship, celebrates the Eighth Army in Ozymandias Unbound :

Not for fear of the battle, nor pity of thousands in pain
Shall this Desert be stirred ; nor for ought that seems new in this strife,
Neither think that the bloods which are spilled in this bitter bright rain
Shall be mourned by these sands, nor the darkness encompassing life.

They are old, they are old, and in memory of conquerors gone
Who have tasted their vastness—and withered, whose dust is a part
Of the unresting ocean that grinds their own faces in stone,
The Desert is wistful ; but stirred not in soul nor in heart.

Yet this Desert mankind has not touched nor bewildered of yore,
Beholding those travel-stained men whose magnificent tide
Has swept in defiance the length of His northernmost shore
Feels something of greatness, of awe, and of splendid pride.

It is with a sense of deep gratitude that I renew my annual subscription to The Poetry Review. Your magazine never fails to bring joy and beauty into this war-cracked world. I trust and sincerely hope that you will be able to continue your good work. Betty Hayes, Blackpool.

THE POETRY OF ROBERT BRIDGES

WHY has the poetry of so English a poet as the shy, scholarly Robert Bridges not gained a wider popularity? Except for his lyrics, some of which are the finest in our language, and except for his last great philosophical work, *The Testament of Beauty*, written when he was an old man of eighty, Bridges has been too little appreciated and never properly understood. It may be that he is too intellectual to appeal to the many, too fastidious by temperament, but for sheer magnificence and beauty of language few surpass him. Bridges was a highly original poet, whose passion for musical speech induced him to experiment both in rhythm and diction, thus incurring the scorn of the critics, who called him pedantic. But this is an unfair charge, as we see when we turn to such little masterpieces as "On a Dead Child" or "Nightingales," where his use of an original metre was at first bitterly criticised.

Robert Bridges was born in 1844 and educated at Eton and Corpus Christi College, Oxford. After travelling in Egypt and Syria he became a medical student at Bart's, with the intention of acquiring experience in a profession other than his chosen medium of poetry and he actually practised medicine for some years. Returning from wintering in Italy in 1882 he lived for some time at the Manor House, Yattenden, where all his plays were written except for "Prometheus." When he was created Poet Laureate in 1913, the appointment was much criticised, for his work was not the type to appeal to the popular journalist. Undismayed by criticism, for nearly a quarter of a century he lived in a house he built for himself at Boar's Hill, Oxford, devoting himself entirely to literature. To-day we have the result in some of the choicest and loveliest poems that have ever been composed. He died in 1930, a year after his "swan song," *The Testament of Beauty*, had won for him a kind of docile popularity. Besides his other work Bridges wrote seven plays, which we cannot discuss here; suffice it to say they have great dramatic power.

The Victorian poets, such as Browning and Tennyson, were never his models in technique, or rather did his philosophic temperament find a greater sympathy with the works of Plato, Aristotle and Spinoza. He is Victorian in one thing, in his avoidance of the physical element in love. Bridges revolted from the romantic tendencies of his day; for instance, in the *Shorter Poems* (*1890*), he puts behind him the whole tradition of romantic poetry based on traditional associations and sings of natural beauty, the beauty of fire and snow, trees and flowers.

What are his chief qualitities as a poet? His refinement of taste, his classicism, his joy of earth and freshness of vision, his sense of beauty and, above all, permeating everywhere his sense of joy.

In the *Growth of Love* sonnets (1873), published in his thirty-third year, there is a notable resemblance to the poets of the Italian Renaissance.

The sonnets, like Dante's, are sweet and rather wistful, yet marked by a strong religious feeling and nowhere, except in the "Vita Nuova," does exalted love so nearly rise to the dignity of a religion :

> And when we sit alone, and as I please
> I taste thy love's full smile, and can enstate
> The pleasure of my kingly heart at ease,
> My thought swims like a ship, that with the weight
> Of her rich burden sleeps on the infinite seas
> Becalm'd and cannot stir her golden freight.

Surely this is one of the most beautiful sestets in our language.

Like the slow unfolding of a northern spring, Bridges' genius ripened gradually, yet for the work of a young man the *Growth of Love* is extremely mature. The first stanzas seem to lack humanity, but as the poem proceeds it gains continually in warmth of feeling, until we get the exquisite tenderness of the culminating verses, a solemn invocation to the "Eternal Father." Like Keats he made love his religion. The sonnets are not so much a story as the development of the ideal of love, a history of its psychology, but even as he is writing, his reasoning faculties are making excuses for writing about love at all.

With his finely-steeled temperament and sense of classical restraint Bridges had a haughty disdain of emotion for its own sake, thus in his frequent references to joy—and no poet has ever sought for joy more ardently—he is always conscious of its fugitive nature. How strangely wistful is his poetry :

> Joy, sweetest life to enjoy, where dost thou dwell
> Upon the formless moments of our being ? . . .

Not for him the sustained ecstasy of a Shelley, for the moment after he has fallen a victim to the powerful emotion of joy, he is questioning its very source. The fastidious spirit of Bridges shrank from fine extravagance as from a breach of taste. Poetry is a sober ecstasy for him.

> Ah heavenly joy ! But who hath ever heard
> Who hath seen joy, or who shall ever find
> Joy's language ? There is neither speech nor word
> Nought but itself—to teach it to mankind.

In the shorter poems he seems to find joy, so characteristic of his poems, less elusive. For him flowers are "a joy of love at sight" and he feels joy when listening to the bird song, which is so abundant in the Sussex he knew so well. Probably his finest flight of imagination is reached in the Ode in "Prometheus," where he demands of his "vague desires" "leaping flames of the soul" as he calls them :

> What doth tempt you forth
> To melt in the South or shiver in the frosty North ?
> What seek ye or find ye in your random flying,
> For ever soaring aloft, soaring and dying ?
> Joy, the joy of flight ;

Then with almost too sudden a descent to earth :

> Ah ! could I control
> These vague desires, these leaping flames of the soul,
> Could I but quench the fire, ah ! could I stay
> My soul that flieth, alas, and dieth away !

It would be difficult to find anything more English than the *Shorter Poems,* for they bring to us the scent of the hawthorn in May, the song of a lark overhead on a summer's day, and the bareness of a wood in winter with a river-mist covering the sodden trees. Yet, in so far as Bridges' genius is reflective rather than intuitive, it is remote from the national stamp. His style is simple, direct and devoid of pretension, and his poetry is rather a return to naturalness of writing than a return to nature. It is surprising that a poem such as "London Snow" should have failed to impress, but this probably owing to its original metre. We can see the white crispness of the flakes as the snow curls and falls :

> Deadening, muffling, stifling its murmurs failings
> Lazily and incessantly floating down and down.

The scene is real to us as we have all looked out of a window at a snow-storm at one time or another. So with the poem "The Downs." What could give a more perfect word-picture than the first verse ?

> O bold majestic downs, smooth, fair and lonely.

There is a certain grandeur about it which reminds us of Milton, and indeed both poets were aristocrats in taste and feeling.

Bridges was like Keats, a poet of beauty, and nobody has caught the moods of the various seasons with a surer touch.

His message is one of hope and cheer for our darkest hours. Thus, the father grieving for his dead child "must gather his faith together, and his strength make stronger."

As he grew older, Bridges, the founder of the Society for Pure English, became increasingly interested in prosody and experiments in language. For instance, in "October" and other poems (1913), he practised Neo-Miltonic syllabics as used by Milton in "Samson Agonistes." In the "Flowering Tree" and "in der Freude," rhyme is never essential, but is admitted as an ornament at will, like alliteration. Similarly in *New Verse* (1925), the first seven verses have been called "loose Alexandrines," for they are modelled on the verse composed of twelve syllables as used in medieval romances.

The *Testament of Beauty* is a rare example of a great didactic poem, for poetry seeking to instruct is very seldom good. Bridges was extremely intellectual, and as one would expect, the work abounds in philosophical argument. His philosophy of life is the witness borne by beauty to the truth that reality is good, or in the language of Christianity that God is

love. Like Darwin, whose name is commonly associated with the evolution of man, he traces the "essence of self" from the elements of nature up through plants and animals to reasoning man. It is an attempt to express a reasoned aesthetic theory of life. Bridges has been accused of wilfully neglecting politics, but there are signs that as an intense individualist he had little sympathy with communism. Obsessed as we have become to-day by systems of government and different ideologies, we are apt to forget that a poet's primary mission is to create beauty rather than be a propagandist. Truly he might have written of himself as he did of man :

> Beauty is the prime motive of all his excellence
> His aim and peaceful purpose.

Since his death Bridges has had and will continue to have a growing influence on a new generation of poets, yet we are too near his period to hazard a guess what his eventual place in English literature will be. That his reputation will increase with the years can hardly be doubted, though he may never be universally popular. It is certain that a new generation of poetry lovers, yet unborn, will bestow a more generous measure of praise on Bridges' "uncared for songs" than his contemporaries have given them.

BRYAN BEVAN.

[*Mr. Bevan, a direct descendant of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, is continuing in the family tradition.*—ED.]

BRYAN BEVAN further writes : Lately, I have been reading an interesting cross-section of poetry, representative of contemporary work. Those who are fond of saying that no war poets are being produced by this war would do well to read Raymond Tong's *Requiem for the War Dead* (Fortune Press). Tong is immensely virile and possesses a powerful mind, which is able to delve beneath the surface of things :

> And you who sought wild beauty madly through
> The world, rest now and find your peace,
> For see,
> In this warm monotone of blue there's more of beauty than you ever knew
> On Earth ;

His is a deep awareness of beauty, the reality hidden beneath appearance, and there is a quality of inspiration in his work too often lacking in modern poetry. He has a feeling for musical language and an intuitive understanding of character. One or two of his poems show a nostalgic longing to return to the saner paths of peace, and it is to be hoped that this poet will be spared to fulfil his promise to write "in a world that's new from the birth-pangs of this fast dying age."

One of the Few is a little volume of war poems by Chloris Heaton Ross (Favil Press). Her title is, of course, borrowed from the Prime Minister's famous words. She is probably less virile than Tong, but she knows well the common things dear to the hearts of Englishmen, and her love of country is realistic and sane. But this poet's sense of rhythm is little developed, consequently, much of the verse is a little laboured and fails to please. One cannot escape from the conclusion that it might be more easily rendered into prose. Yet *One of the Few* is to be recommended to all who would wish to derive a better understanding of the England for which we are fighting.

To turn from the war poems we have a volume of selected poems called *Legacy to Love* by John Gawsworth (Collins). This poet is extremely individualistic and though he is modern in his approach to poetry, does not belong to any modernist school. The poems in this volume are lyrical and imaginative, and he has the rare gift by a happy choice of phrase, of creating an image which leaps to the mind and remains there as startling as it is unexpected. Take, for instance, his "Winter Pain" :

O bright was winter on the branch
one morning early
When holly tried its blood to staunch
With spiked leaf pearly !
I saw its little berry-wounds ;
I saw them clearly,
And sudden new life's soldier rounds
Come cruelly, yearly.

Gawsworth is an artist in his economical use of words and avoidance of the superflous. The mood of several of the poems—for instance, that of "Nihility" and "Regret" is rather gloomy. Yet the poet accepts life for he sees the futility of struggling against it. Gawsworth reveals his own personality in his poetry more than most poets, and as an original writer he should have a very promising future before him.

A tender, rather sensuous quality is revealed in Kathleen Raine's first volume of poems, *Stone and Flower* (Poetry, London). Like Gawsworth, she has a vivid imagination, but she is far more sentimental. Probably the best poems in this volume are the sensuous "Desire" and the sentimental "Parting," with its air of lingering regret. It is a pity that in some of her work Miss Raine is too consciously clever. How can the sun "step like a gentleman" or "walk across London like a young M.P. risen to the occasion !" She has also a tiresome habit of repetition, which adds nothing to the effect.

Reminiscent of Hilaire Belloc is the animal verse in A. M. P. Dawson's *The Pageant of Man* (Headley Bros.). There is variety for all tastes in that the pages contain not only gay and frivolous verse, but also the more serious "Sonnets from the Spanish." Mr. Dawson is genuinely humorous, rather whimsical and has a sense of mischief. He has been, perhaps, a little too ambitious in his choice of title, for it is not possible in a mere hundred pages to do justice to the many varied aspects of mankind.

Frederick Davidson, in *Captured Fancies* (Printers' Guild, Toronto), shows a certain sensitiveness, but he must learn to clothe his poetical thought in a more simple language. He does not rouse or inspire.

Sheila Steen has a genuine gift for lyric writing, and many of the poems in the *Honeysuckle Hedge* (O.U.P.) are of a lyrical nature. The one beginning "I fear, I fear—what is it that I fear ?" is particularly charming. The poems are concerned, amongst other things, with art (in the broad sense of the term), nature and Delacroix painting, and the last poem in the volume is a narrative poem on a Persian subject. They have a vivid and attractive turn of phrase, but in poems other than the lyrics there is a certain looseness and weakness of texture and Miss Steene is too fond of experimenting with words.

Preludes is the title of a small anthology of new poetry (Opus). Much of the work is immature, but Derek Stanford, at least, shows a talent for satire. It would seem that too many of our writers are engrossed with death (as a subject).

Lastly, we have Kenneth Allott's most significant *Ventriloquist's Doll* (Cresset Press). Allott has developed greatly in sensibility and technique, and in this new volume shows traces of Anden's influence. The first five pieces were written before

September, 1939. In ' Christmas after Munich" Mr. Allott shows he has a power of arresting phrase which is extremely effective. This book should be read by those who would wish to follow the trend of modern poetry. He certainly is a voice of his generation.

GARCIA LORCA AND MUSIC

The composer, Manuel de Falla, said of Lorca on one occasion : "You know what Lorca is as a poet ? Well, as a musician he could have been as great, or greater."

Lorca's poems are folk-songs, direct and simple ; strange symphonies, imaginative and intricate. His verse contains the essential of poetic perfection—effective combination of imagery and music.

The earliest years of his life were spent in a village of the Granada valley, where the moody folk-songs and the improvised ballads that the peasants sang at their work made the child's ears acutely sensitive to the most rudimentary things of music. He took a law degree at the university, but this was only because his parents wished it. His was too vital a personality for him to devote his whole interests to academic study and routine. During his time at the university he read enormously for his own pleasure and profit. There was little method in his reading, but he picked the best from all languages. Slowly the intellectual circles of Granada became aware of the dark-eyed, vivid young man and, without him being conscious of it, he began to influence contemporary thought to a certain extent.

He wrote from an early age, but at first he had a horror of appearing in print. He believed that poems should be spoken aloud, sung, or acted for the amusement of friends. His first published work was a play which gained little attention from critics and no favour from the public. He won much more recognition when his poems appeared, but the remarkable thing is that, so extraordinary was his personality, he gained the first place in contemporary Spanish poetry before the publication of his important works. Everybody had heard of Lorca : everybody wanted to meet Lorca—listen to him reciting, enjoy his jokes, his witty observations. Not only was he sought after by the intellectuals, so-called, but by the workers, so-called. Lorca was classless : his poems appealed to all. His personality had many facets ; he was an extrovert, an observer, his imagination unlimited, his sensitivity acute. He began to publish more and more. His popularity spread throughout Spain and to all parts of the world. The most astonished at his extraordinary success was the poet himself ! He travelled a great deal in America, North and South, and returning to Spain established a close contact with the theatre, writing, directing and often acting in his own plays.

In 1934 the great underground strife in Spain came to the surface. Lorca was a member of no party, but his sympathies were for the peasants, and his outlook was progressive. The reactionary elements traded skillfully on his name for political purposes ; he was attacked for the help he had always given to the peasants. A few days after the civil war broke out in 1936 a small party of Franco's supporters captured Lorca and assassinated him in the outskirts of Granada.

He was in his thirties. If the Spanish people had not been engaged in their tragic struggle his death would have caused a national mourning. As it was his poems lived on the lips of the fighting men and women. In his death he became a legend.

Lorca was too pure a singer to indulge in deep philosophy. He was chiefly a poet of the open air and valued life in all forms—always markedly observant and translating what he saw into his own peculiar idiom. Sometimes his images are so strange as to be almost surrealistic, but the terse way in which they are presented, the absence of dreary, academic words makes the image live. He possessed vitality in the highest

degree—a gay, reckless, sensuous vitality. But this *joie-de-vivre* was coupled with profound compassion for the unhappy, the unlucky, the oppressed, the misunderstood, as is shown in his "Ode to the King of Harlem" :

Ah Harlem ! Ah Harlem ! Ah Harlem !
There is no anxiety comparable to your oppressed scarlets,
to your blood shaken within your dark eclipse,
to your garnet violence deaf and dumb in the penumbra,
to your great King, a prisoner with a commissionaire's uniform.

. . . . . .

Negroes, negroes, negroes, negroes.
Never snake, nor goat, nor mule grew pale at death.
The woodcutter does not know when
the clamorous trees which he fells expire.
Wait under the shadow of your terrified King
until the hemlock, thistles and stinging-nettles disturb the furthermost terraces.

It is a portrait of the finest irony—that portrait of the "great King, a prisoner with a commissionaire's uniform." Occasionally he concentrates his strong sense of justice and pathos into lines of stark realism. One splendid example of this direct statement is to be found in the "Ode to Walt Whitman." He experienced a mingled feeling of horror and amazement at the life in New York, where "boys fainted stretched on the cross of lassitude" :

Agony, agony, dream, ferment and dream.
The corpses decompose under the clock of the cities,
War passes weeping with a million grey rats,
the rich give to their mistresses
small illuminated moribunds,
and Life is not noble, not good, nor sacred.

Life in Lorca was wild and powerful, continually renewed from some source in his personality : he could afford to give of himself, and he gave unstintingly.

He is an artist of extreme restraint. He does not write merely for his own subjective pleasure, but takes into account the reactions of his readers and audience, remembering that they, too, have an imagination. This fact, that poems are written to be read or spoken by *others,* is ignored by many, too many would-be poets. For this reason Lorca's poems have a personal appeal : he creates his effects by suggestion rather than direct description. For instance, in "Hunter," a poem of eight lines, is a natural drama that could be the subject for many a lengthy ode.

Above the pine trees :
four pigeons go through the air.

Four pigeons
fly and turn round.
They carry wounded
their four shadows.

Below the pine trees :
four pigeons lie on the earth.

And at the beginning of "Ballad of the Little Square" eleven words provide a perfect picture :

The children sing
in the quiet night ;

Clear stream,
serene fountain !

Lorca gives his audience the cue and leaves imagination to do the rest. His contact is superb.

But Garcia Lorca the musician—. Lovely as the English language is, the words cannot sing in such a perfect way as Spanish. Our nouns and adjectives do not end on the same letter, for one thing. There are particular words which may be utterly melodious in Spanish, but which, when translated, jar on the senses and seem out of place, such as "Ay, muchacha, muchacha"—"Ah, lass, lass," or "es impossible callarla"—"it is impossible to hush it." The translators seem to have done the very best they could to preserve Lorca's original melody. Where melody is subordinate to imagery there is no fault to find.

La nina del bello rostro	The girl with the beautiful face
signe cogiendo aceituna	goes on gathering olives,
con el brazo gris del viento	with the grey arm of the wind
denido por la cintura.	encircling her waist.

or

But now he sleeps endlessly.
Now the moss and the grass
open with sure fingers
the flower of his skull.
And now his blood comes out singing:
singing along marshes and meadows,
sliding on frozen horns,
faltering soulless in the mist,
stumbling over thousand hoofs
like a long, dark, sad tongue,
to form a pool of agony
close to the starry Guadalquiver.

or

La penumbra, con paso de elefante,	dusk, with the step of an elephant,
empujaba las ramas y los troncos.	pushed aside the branches and the tree trunks.

But where imagery is subordinate to melody then the Spanish version has it every time:

Empieza el llanto	The lament
de la guitarra.	of the guitar begins.
Es inutil	It is useless
callarla.	to hush it.
Es impossible	It is impossible
callarla.	to hush it.
Llora monotona	It weeps monotonously
como llora el agua,	as the water weeps,
como llora el viento	as the wind weeps
so bre la nevada.	over the snowfall.
Es impossible	It is impossible
callarla.	to hush it.
Llora por cosas	It weeps for things
lejanas.	far away.

The rhythm of the original lament is a continuous crescendo and decrescendo, subdued and thin. It is not a poem *about* a guitar: it is the guitar itself. Whereas the English lament is staccato and out of key: there is little meaning to it: the rhythm is continually being chopped up. And the subtle music of a simple sentence such as "Se mueren de amor los ramos" is lost in the translation "the flowers die of love." But this is due

to our irregular English language—not to the ignorance of the translators, who have indeed done a fine work in rendering the vivid images of Lorca so exactly.

The tremendous lament for the dead bullfighter—Ignacio Sanchez Mejias—is surely one of the greatest poems written during the last twenty years. It is planned in various movements and moods and the whole resembles a symphony. Here are the last two verses of the fourth movement. They might almost mourn the death of the poet himself.

Nobody knows you. No. But I sing of you.
I sing for posterity your profile and grace.
The signal maturity of your understanding.
Your appetite for death and the taste of its mouth.
The sadness of your once valiant gaiety.

It will be a long time, if ever, before there is born
an Andalusian so true, so rich in adventure.
I sing his elegance with words that groan,
and I remember a sad breeze through the olive trees.

PATRICIA LEDWARD.

POETS AND PRETENDERS

The first volume topping the pile on this occasion is an attractive little book, *Poems, 1938-1943*, by Margaret Freeman (G. Street and Co.). As the title indicates, there is some preoccupation with dates in Miss Freeman's mind, which has led her in a foreword to inform us that nothing written before 1938 has been included and to append a date to every poem which has. We do not wish to notice this idiosyncracy more than to say that it is irrelevant to the matter in hand. The poems are neither better nor worse for the date, nor are the dates for the poems and we believe it to be an excellent rule in publication to avoid any irrelevance or extraneous appeal which might obscure the issue. That the poet is young is, of course, no excuse for publishing bad verse, nor can it heighten the charm of good poetry. The poet is only as necessary to the reader as his paper and ink. It is the work alone which has importance.

We like this book, there is good stuff in it, if better promise. We missed in some pieces the easy simplicity and emotional texture which make true poetry, but there are many good lines and phrases. We do not think Miss Freeman has always followed her own boast:

We had bare shaped words for it and our mouths
Were proud . . . . . .

and we are sorry for we do not remember a better definition of poetry if the pride be the selfless pride in good work. The insidious blandishments of literary skill, deftness with phrase and rich vocabulary, when one has them as Miss Freeman has, are hard to resist, but these things are not poetry, which is essentially an affair of the heart, born with excitement and almost without conscious thought in which, in some mysterious way, emotion becomes permanent in the words and communicable. The book fails, we think, in this quality of authentic inspiration, but Miss Freeman is young, as her publishers inform us—under twenty—and with the deepening of her experience she will, if she can disregard the lure of success, become a worthy mouthpiece of her muse.

In the dedication of the very next volume *Bow Bells are Silent*, by M. D. Anderson (Williams and Norgate, 1s. 6d.), there is a stanza which sweetly strikes the true poetic note:

I know a lovely lady
Frail as the fairest flower
Yet love with her is safer
Than diamonds in the Tower.

Here is poetry and we probed deeper with a lively anticipation, but there was little more to match such delicate lyricism. The volume is a record, a thought diary of London in the air raid period, and this is a theme that needs a mighty pen to illuminate with the true fire. Miss Anderson's verses are incontestably competent, but have an air of objectivity which leaves the reader cold and unmoved. Moreover, there is much that is prose presented in blank verse. The authoress has not realised, apparently, that the blank verse form is the more insistently clamourous for fine poetic lines because of its lack of musical rhyme, and has fallen a victim to its deceitful appearance of ease. The shorter and perhaps less consciously ambitious pieces are by far the best. Here are to be found the best lines. The crisper form has demanded and often obtained a sparer diction and a simpler and sincerer beauty.

A very different volume is *Pied Hiker,* by Major W. T. Shorthose (Hughes and Harber). The author is a man of wide interests, who sings about anything and everything with a real gusto, which, if it sometimes lacks finish, is always interesting. To call his mood "various" is a meiosis when a "Sonnet to Sheila" rubs shoulders with "Stalingrad" and "African Dusk" proceeds by way of "Daffodils" to "Sunset in the Bay of Biscay." The volume is well titled but is not thereby the easier to read. The mental and emotional gymnastics required are fatiguing.

There are, nevertheless, some excellent poems among others which, inevitably, are not so successful. One little gem is "Virginity" and it is in this mood that Mr. Shorthose rises highest towards Olympus. We would also mention "A Little Book," which is genuinely moving. Simplicity is his when he seeks for it, but he can and does, as so many others, trammel and hide himself with words on occasion. He, himself, says—"How more adroit God's simple things"—in a poem called "England's Factories, 1942," a strong vibrant poem, which conveys irresistibly the ordered violence of industrial war. He should not forget this great truth.

We recommend this book. Mr. Shorthose can be as crisp as a cracker and as light as a feather and has succeeded in this collection in being both.

The next volume in our haphazard choice strikes an entirely different note. This is *Visions and Dreams,* by Lieut. Gurnett (T.P.H., London, 1942, 1s.) and is also a very varied collection, but all alike in revealing a certain devotional attitude of mind. The verses have simplicity and feeling but not much imaginative depth and seem, in consequence, rather hackneyed There is, of course, nothing new under the sun and, therefore, all the more need in poetry for new angles, new imagery, not to mention lively and vibrant diction. We missed these and the work seemed to us to have value more in a personal and particular sense than from any universal appeal. We observe, without approval, that the volume is adorned with a musing photograph of the author. We have commented before upon irrelevancies of this and other kinds which appear to us unduly egotistical. There is but small relation between the poet and his poem if it is a good poem and an intrusion of the poet's personality, either by portraiture or by any other means, seems to us to suggest an ignorance of this truth—or does it ?

The next to come uppermost *Days Enduring,* by Roland Mathias (Arthur H. Stockwell, Ltd., 2s. 6d.), seemed at once broader, deeper and more authentically tuneful because of its consistent optimism, even in its sadder moments and its catholic zest for life. We endorse this volume as a record of a mind that is emotionally sensitive and capable of communicating emotion. This is done with a vigorous economy and a nice adjectival originality, which are at times quite tonic. The poems seem to spring from the heart, the true birthplace of poetry, and merely use the head for the mechanics of expression. These are sufficiently, even beautifully, clothed in imagery. Try this from the poem "Dusk" :

. . . . . Your wake
Still laps upon my drowsing shore
And troubles dreams, but quieter now
The night can hold us all at one again,
The unknowing and unknown.

The next volume, *Sonnets to the Beloved,* by Maud K. Dyrenforth (Arthur H. Stockwell, Ltd.), needs no further description of its nature. The first and major section of the book contains nothing but love sonnets and very good some of them are, while the second section is composed of poems in other forms but still upon the same absorbing subject. It is, however, upon the sonnets that the book asks to be judged and in this the authoress shows a sound preference. She is at home in the atmosphere of rigorous discipline which this form demands, pursuing an effortless course with a plenteous supply of twin-born rhymes and a happy and occasionally lovely gift of phrasing. She is, of course, constrained by her unrelieved constancy to one subject, which limits her horizon to a pair of encircling arms as it were, but still the book is the bringer of good things in sufficient measure. To her the whole of creation is in a conspiracy to celebrate love and willingly lends its boundless airs and unfathomable oceans to embellish the matter. When this, alas, so transient emotion has relinquished a little its too-possessive hold upon the authoress's imagination we may look forward to even better sonnets from her muse upon wider and different themes.

Which leaves us ready for the next upon the pile, an arresting collection called *The Unfailing Spring,* by Clive Sansom (Favil Press, 2s.). A "Resurgam" book, it comes to us well recommended and in this case justly, for there is feeling, inspiration and a real power of diction and rhythm to carry them into the heart. The book is an effortless synthesis of technical skill and poetic emotion, which is as delightful to encounter as a happy marriage, where each partner supplies just that quality which calls forth the best in the other. To name but one poem in a bunch where each has a claim to admiration, "Seagulls," shows an unusually satisfying adjustment of emotion to intellect and rhythm to theme. The latter is especially praiseworthy in this poem and is all too seldom achieved or even sought by either poets or pretenders. Yet it is only necessary to find an example such as this, where the rhythm is as excellent a description of a gull's flight as the words themselves, to appreciate how essentially this quality operates for good or ill in the making of a poem. We believe such happy choice of rhythm to be largely unconscious and by that token more surely an indication that we are here in the presence of a poet.

The next volume, also a "Resurgam" book, though qualified by the words "Younger Poets," was disappointing. This was *Experience of England,* by John Atkins (Favil Press, 1s.). Much of this short volume is prose and so far as we can judge the author was unconcerned that we or any other might think so. There is poetry to be found in spots, but some even of these are misted in obscurity, which also has an Olympian air of take it or leave it. These divine impudences are the blessings of the young, whose impatience with the world is, of course, its only hope of salvation, but we do wish their teachings were less hard upon the senile intelligence. Mental gymnastics comport as little with hardened arteries as the other kind and in self-defence we can say and with truth that complete lucidity never yet obscured a vital message or a transcendant beauty.

Mr. Atkins can, however, write and write well. He is not a traditionalist, except in the unfailing human urge for something new wherein he is, of course, of the oldest of old schools. His book has force and vigour, but we think he can do very much better if he will.

The First Poetry of John Haden (Favil Press, 3s. 6d.) was the next to come to hand.

The publisher's announcement draws attention to the author's love of England and there can be no doubt that this is very real ; but we are afraid it has not proliferated in poetry of any very high order, but only in competent verses where affection flows in a candid and jocund stream, but with none of those deep, mysterious pools where the muses dwell.

Then straight away we were plunged into pool after pool of the simplest and most pellucid poetry we had so far encountered. Called simply *Midnight,* and by Brian Farrington (College of St. Columba Press), we were subtly excited by the realisation that we were reading something modern, intelligible, humble and utterly unself-conscious. The book is very short, less than ten minutes suffice to read it, but every poem has the genuine ring of poetry and reading, one cares not for rhythm or diction, rhyme or form. Enough is enough and in the delicate sufficiency of these poems is the slaking of thirst. One realises at once, and once again, what poetry is ; that it is, in reality, only the simplicities which we are too clever to see, the simplicities which are not of the surface or of one, two or three dimensions, but which, lying in full view, yet go deep and contain the answer to life itself.

> I have made these songs out of
> Gusty passions
> Raging round the fragile
> Shell of the brain

the author says in his prologue. This gives, perhaps, a wrong impression of what is to follow. Here are, in reality, no gusty passions, but rather an adoring observation that sees beauty with eyes sharpened by a strong and abiding affection. There is plenty of variety. From "Nocturne," a Dublin scene which ends so :

> To where the steamers are,
> One under way,
> Its rumbling engines hammering it
> Out to the sea,
> Its deep siren blowing
> A booming note
> From its sounding, hot, brass,
> Steam-filled throat

to "The Thorn Tree" :

> A crabbed old thorn tree
> Clutches at the Moon
> . . . . . .
> High on the hill
> Where the dark winds blow
> Where the great trees of the forest
> Fear to grow.
> Bleak and twisted
> Black and alone,
> The old bent branches
> Creep towards the Moon
> On a network of stars . . . .

is a goodish way, but wherever we are taken we are surely guided and always glad of the excursion. This is a book to get and to read, if only for the great lesson it drives home so well that true poetry is come at not by schools or creeds, pedantry or labour, but wells as naturally as spring water from those that have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Last, but not least, if bulk be taken as our measurement, came *Whisperings and Whimperings,* by Jay Ranz (Jacob Ranz). This is not a volume of poetry, except in form, indeed, the author, in a somewhat egotistical foreword, admits nearly as much. He claims to have developed a style of his own, but we do not think he has achieved beauty or importance notwithstanding. Nor do we find his thought, albeit very vigorously expressed, interesting or original.

Poetry London, after an irregular existence, is likely to appear more regularly under the management of Messrs. Nicholson and Watson. No. 9 is an attractive issue, with poems by Richard Church, Herbert Palmer, John Waller, Charles Williams, Louis Macneice, Alun Lewis, Nicholas Moore and other representatives of contemporary verse, purged of eccentricity and deliberate obscurity, except for one short

contribution by the much vaunted Dylan Thomas, which, to some readers, rises to the zenith of modern poetry—and beyond :

Last night I dived my beggar arm
Days deep in her breast that wore no heart
For me alone, but only a rocked drum
Telling the heart I broke of a good habit.

That her loving, unfriendly limbs
Would plunge my betrayal from sheet to sky,
So the betrayal might learn in the sun beams
Of the death in a bed in another country.

The prose contributions are arresting and argumentative and up-to-the-minute, suggesting that a more apt title for this provocative periodical would be "Contemporary Poetry." No. 10 is to be devoted to writers who have not already appeared in *P.L.*, or whose work has never before been published—a bold and interesting departure and No. 13 is to be an anthology of poems from the Services.

The King of the Hellenes, at a special audience given at Claridge's Hotel, London, received from Mr. S. F. A. Coles, the writer, traveller and poet, the first copy, specially bound and with printed Presentation Inscription, of Mr. Cole's new book of travel-verse—a tribute to Greece in peace and war, entitled *Cities of Troy: Memorials of Travel in Greece, Magna Graecia and Asia Minor* (reviewed in our last issue). The collection, which bears a foreword by the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, is dedicated to the King in memory of an encounter between His Majesty and the author amid the classic ruins of Delphi before the war.

No doubt it is a reflection of the times inherent in all modern art but I have been struck by the almost invariable gloom of modern poetry, most of which leaves a sense of depression and hopelessness which is surely not the stuff of life. As Carlyle says of marriage, there are the flowers and whose hand is not against the man "who, with grinning grunting satisfaction, digs at the roots and lays bare the dung they flourish in." But I subscribe again in the hope that our poets in the "new world" will lay aside their frustration and depression and *sing* of joy and beauty.

Blackpool. JOSEPH LESLIE.

The 21st annual convention of the Canadian Authors' Association opened in Montreal—second largest French city in the world—with brilliant, vivacious Madge Macbeth, National President, in the Chair, and beside her sat Victor Barbeau, President of La Société des Ecrivains Canadiens, bringing a message from our French friends. At the evening banquet in Windsor Hotel, Alfred Noyes spoke, and read some of his poems ; Abbé Maheux, of Quebec City, in a fine English address said : "Authors should be inspired with spiritual values, with the spirit of sacrifice, and of service to the country."

Watson Kirconnell, professor, poet and prose writer, was elected President.

Since the convention the Poetry Group (Montreal C.A.A.) has published a modest volume entitled *Montreal in Verse,* to celebrate the City's Centenary, the proceeds of the sale of which will swell the Queen's Canadian Fund.

CHRISTINE L. HENDERSON, Canadian V.P.

The Poetry Society interests me enormously : PTE. A. O'NEILL PHELPS, Att. 464, L.A.A. Bty., R.A.

DYNAMICS OF AMERICAN POETRY : XCVIII

All lovers of poetry are rejoiced to find that the poet, William Rose Benét, husband of Elinor Wylie, has secured for our delight a few last and unpublished poems (Knopf). Let us begin by saying :

Her gleaming words in rare mosaics patterned
Remain immortal proof behind her, here.
That through all travailing she used as master
Art's shining spear.

Isabel Paterson wrote, on a day in December in 1928 : "To have known Elinor Wylie at all . . . . made her death a personal loss. Brightness fell from the air when the news came." This reviewer crossed the ocean with Elinor Wyli shortly before the mournful news of her death reached the world, and it is an unforgetable experience.

We turn eagerly to the volume and to the foreword by William Rose Benét, and we learn that Miss Wise aided Mr. Benét in the choice of these posthumously-published poems. Mr. Benét tells us concerning this volume. It is not claimed that there is anything else that surpasses Elinor's former work. But for the student of her work there are some interesting things. Mr. Benét gives us a sentence which throws light on what Elinor Wylie thought of war, appropriate to this hour, "A grim crisis when we are left no choice but to fight destruction with destruction."

Let us read this powerful appreciation of the challenge of life, "Since We Can Neither Run Nor Hide" :

Since we can neither run nor hide
Stand still, myself, and take the missile
Upon the sinister left side
And welcome it, and let it nestle
Against you so, and smooth its ruffled
Plumes, and stroke their down in peace.
And thus shall the pursuit be baffled
And we survive a breathing space.
Since we by no means may escape
By climbing up, by crouching lower
Let us assume a different shape
To meet the sharp and pointed shower,
This blast that penetrates and threatens
Now its arrows fly in sheaves.
Stand tranquil as a tree that sweetens
The winds that violate its leaves.

A greeting to the Sun follows :

Now stars burn out to ashes
and lawns are spread with lace,
and morning lifts her lashes
to look upon your face.

Now trees are silver tasselled
and clouds are water-spun
and I rise up undazzled
Who only see the sun.

Included in this collection is the long poem, "The Golden Heifer," published earlier, which has been claimed to possess much magic.

A number of voices lift to say William Plumer Fowler has done it again. This second book, *Granite Ledges* (Bruce Humphries, Boston), takes us from the Isles of Shoals to Greece. In Fowler's stride this seems an easy task. *Flashing Wings*, his first

book which came to us a short time ago and was reviewed in these pages, marked the arrival of a true poet! Of New England background, this poet is sensitive to all the variations of wind and weather in the material world, giving us glimpses occasionally of what we are pleased to call the world beyond. Here follows "Battle of Greece":

Hurl, Zeus, thy thunders from Olympus' height!
Phoebus, thy shafts! and Ares, thy grim spear!
Wield, Hermes, the curved sword that all men fear!
And fierce Poseidon, stand thou guard to-night
With dripping trident posed by Britain's might!
Yea, Hades! from the underworld uprear,
By Hellas' side, sharp steel and flames that sear
The souls of all who scoff at truth and right!
Hera! Athené! raise your gleaming shields!
And Aphrodité, lift they guiding hand!
Now, Artemis, thy deadly arrows speed!
And Pan, make haste! Leave valleys and green fields,
With clattering hooves, on mountain heights to stand
And fight with Hellas in her hour of need!

Easter Sunday, 1941.

Robert Frost is a fortunate man, loved by all who personally know him and appreciated by a wide circle of the readers of poetry. New England to the core, he loves all phases of the New England scene, though born in San Francisco. His ancestors were Scotch-English and through his New England traits run these sturdy strains. His writing life has been spent in New England. There are many long descriptive poems in *Come In* (Henry Holt), selected with a commentary by Louis Untermeyer. We will turn to a sonnet entitled "The Master Speed":

No speed of wind or water rushing by
But you have speed far greater. You can climb
Back up a stream of radiance to the sky,
And back through history up the stream of time.
And you were given this swiftness, not for haste,
Nor chiefly that you may go where you will,
But in the rush of everything to waste,
That you may have the power of standing still—
Off any still or moving thing you say.
Two such as you with such a master speed
Cannot be parted nor be swept away
From one another once you are agreed
That life is only life forevermore
Together wing to wing and oar to oar.

and end with a whimsey, "The Dust of Snow":

The way of a crow — Has given my heart
Shook down on me — A change of mood
The dust of snow — And saved some part
From a hemlock tree — Of a day I had rued.

Mary Siegrist hails from Pennsylvania and possesses the rare witchery of a spell-binding vocabulary. We find her in anthologies and poet laureate of the Women's Press Club of New York, and many more indications of the ways she has travelled. Her first book, *You That Come After*, was foreworded by the beloved bard, Edwin Markham.

In *Flame Rises on the Mountain* (Exposition Press, New York), we cannot pass the first sonnet without applauding it. It is "Dedication" : ....

Thee, thee would I follow—only thee,
Beauty, through sun-paths, and the all of bliss—
Through chaos, night-dark, eyeless storm—through hail
And the terrible lightning's play . . . Only let be
That I shall see thy face, thy form. Give this :
That ever I shall know thou canst not fail
Me—nor yet I thee. And should I lose
The sight of thee, give but thy voice, for I
Shall know that Voice against all sounds that are.
And should I lose both sight and sound, refuse
Not then this plea : Let not the springs run dry :
Still be thou near, who art not ever far !
And shouldst thou wear strange masks, strange shapes, even so
I yet shall know thee—I shall surely know ! . . . .

Is it not true that we have here a veritable singer concerning superlative delights ? We give "From a Minaret" :

Who has watched sunsets from a minaret
And worshipped them, that watcher nevermore
Will walk with small things, Lo ! For him a door
Has opened widely on the Infinite.
He will go hungered on the streets of men
Forevermore, pining for space and wilderness.
He will be sick for home as in a wilderness
Man sickens for his kind. Not ever again
Will he be fed with food, but he will be
The nursling of the gods. Another name
Has lightened in him. Fire from the heart of flame
Has fed him. Now only infinity
Can call and the sound reach the straining ears of his heart,
Dimming the years from this sky-home apart.

I am reminded by the Macmillan Company's issue of the American edition of Joseph Hone's *Life of Yeats* (already noticed in THE POETRY REVIEW) that on the momentous day Charles Lindbergh completed his aerial navigation of the Atlantic and landed at Croydon after touching at Le Bourget, I happened to be lunching with a very charming friend, who offered us as her guest of honour, William B. Yeats. The poet was a very handsome man, as all will testify who knew him, with a beautiful voice. It is a wonderful memory lingering still in my mind of his recital of some of his magical lines. He told us much of Ireland and his love and endeavour for it. In stopping with Sir Archibald and Lady Flower the previous week-end at Stratford-on-Avon, I found at my bedside a collection of Mr. Yeats' poems and copied in my scrap-book a few of the thrilling lines.

We received from the Publicity Director of the distinguished house of Macmillan and Company, New York, a personal special letter urging the acceptance and review of *American Reasons,* by Bonaro W. Overstreet, encompassing a number of vignettes drawn from various walks of life, in their reactions to this present war. Mr. Overstreet is a Californian, lecturer and a writer of a number of books, and one can readily understand how it has happened that this last book of Mr. Overstreet found favour with radio audiences. The titles of these various vignettes will give the reader insight

into Mr. Overstreet's treatment. First, "A Soldier I Met on a Train Said"; number two's "A Young Soldier's Wife Said," which, by the way, is signally pathetic; number three, "A Business Executive Said"; four, "A Woman at Work in Her Kitchen Said"; five, "A Negro Soldier Said"; and six, "A Writer Said." Many authors are coming forward, dealing in varying ways with this great cataclysm. The books must be legion on this theme. ALICE HUNT BARTLETT.

AN ELUCIDATION OF MODERN POETRY WANTED

As one who is a life-long lover of poetry, and having derived great spiritual help and consolation from the works of the great poets—ancient and modern—I write to ask, in all sincerity, for elucidation on the modern interpretation of the word *Poetry*.

I am bewildered at much that passes as "poetry" to-day and, in my ignorance of the modern school of thought emphasised by a predilection for the classic, I would much esteem your kind information as to why strings of words, often grammatically faulty, ignoring punctuation, nebulous, without musical rhythm, and with no two lines harmonising or in scansion, achieve the dignity of being acclaimed *Poetry?*

I have read much modern "verse" with concentration and a real desire to find beauty in it, but I am often made impatient by the too obvious striving to be "odd" or "original," or, worse, *clever;* and I am saddened at the writers groping after a shadow that, in the end, is not there!

Surely all true poets have a message, or seek to find one, or they wish to paint a picture in words. And should not poetry be musical, leaving the reader—or listener—with a sense of the profound beauty, dignity, or fire of the phrasing?

Some of the better modern poems I have read appear to me to be more in the nature of *poetical prose,* but since they are printed line upon line, yet without shape or form in their construction and, of course, scorning the rhyming word, they are published as *poetry.* Please tell me *why?* Needless to say this enquiry does not apply to *anything* published as poetry in THE POETRY REVIEW, and which poetry maintains all the best standards of the art.—DOROTHY DYOTT DRAYSON, Rogers Lane, Stoke Poges, Bucks.

MR. GEO A. PALMER, our Regina (Sask.) corresponding member, sends a word about poetry in Saskatchewan: "The Executive of the Saskatchewan Poetry Society is now engaged in compiling for the press material for their Eighth Annual Year Book, a work containing representative poems by the members of the Society living in different parts of this large agricultural province of Canada. The books are not sponsored, but are sustained solely by sales. The usual annual recital of our poets' work was given at the Hotel Saskatchewan on April 15th, with sustained interest. The recitals are open to the public; they pay expenses and always attract interested audiences.

May I offer two comments on THE POETRY REVIEW of March-April. The article of Mr. Wm. Anthony Wickham expresses an opinion which I heartily endorse and am grateful to him for voicing it; the grandiloquent claim of Mr. H. L. Senior that "the poet is the only real master of life" and enjoys the monopoly of aristocracy of thought is putting the creature before the Creator, "who has vouchsafed to the world its true and only Leader."—J. P. S. THOMPSON, Jamaica Plain, Mass.

I would like to take this opportunity of expressing my deep appreciation of the splendid job THE POETRY REVIEW is doing in bringing into every home it enters a beauty and a deeper feeling for beauty which helps us to combat these difficult times.
Middlesbrough. MARGT. JOHNSON.

THE PLANNING OF POETRY

One hears much to-day of *planning:* the planners being those who would coerce us, and at our own expense. One hopes, at least, that these gentlemen will keep their hands off poetry. I was sitting on the bus the other day and chanced to find myself beside a small girl who was scribbling industriously. I had the curiosity to enquire what she was at work on. *"Poitry,"* she replied, "for homework." She showed me her composition, and I intend no disparagement of the child when I say that what she showed me was drivel in groggy metre.

Another young lady—a schoolgirl, this time, of fourteen or so, whose schoolmaster was cramming her with Vergil at so many lines a night, asked me if I would explain the course taken by the chariot of the sun ? I told her of the conception the Ancients had of an "ocean stream" which encircled the world, and of how the Sun brought his horses downward towards this when his journey was ending, and I added—a realistic detail which I hoped might appeal to her—that in a Greek Epic, the Morning Star is presented as a youth whom Apollo employs to wash the sweat from the weary team in the waves of this ocean, before leading the horses away to their fiery manger.

The student *malgrélui* replied, with superb arrogance, "I suppose as Vergil was a *poet* he was at liberty to express any sort of nonsense that entered his head !"

We cram these unhappy wretches with poetry, precisely as the Victorians did with music. Protesting victims were conducted to the piano, forced to sit there and play scales and practise pieces without the inquisitioners, who set them to this torture, so much as troubling their heads as to whether the victims possessed the remotest aptitude for the art or not !

I was myself "taken through" a Shakespeare play by a schoolmaster who was at the pains to inform the class that "When *he* went to the theatre, it was to *enjoy* himself !"

That is the way to degrade and mechanise the most consummate art of poetry. The right attitude is that of reverence on the part of the individual artist who is ambitious to excel. "The aim of all art is perfection" is a recorded saying of Michelangelo. Shakespeare prefaces his "Venus and Adonis" with a classical couplet which may be loosely rendered :

> Let the vile mob delight in vilest things :
> But lead me, Phoebus, to the Muses' springs !

At the Renaissance the old gods were very much more than literary ornaments ; they were inspirational forces, and the second line of the couplet is in the nature of a prayer. Even the translator of poetry should lay by his pen, unless he feels that he has a *mission.*

"An heroic poem, truly such," wrote Dryden, in the dedication to his translation of the 'Aeneid,' "is undoubtedly the greatest work which the soul of man is capable to preform."

When such is the attitude, something very much above mere mediocrity is to be expected !

That education in poetry is unnecessary is manifest from the fact that Shakespeare emerged without it. But it is worse than unnecessary : it is actively harmful. The fabulous quantity of tenth-rate verse which will arise from the attempt to make every child a poet, will act as so much camouflage to obscure the work of the true poet when he does arise. To mass-education, poets owe less than nothing. Of Stephen Philips, the author of *Paola and Francesca,* the D.N.B. relates, "Odd guineas from poems in the press frequently saved him from starvation." Francis Thompson plumbed the depths of human misery. John Davidson, of the lyrics "Cinque Port" and "In Romney Marsh" shot himself. Richard Middleton, author of much lyric verse of

flawless beauty, chloroformed himself, in penury, in Brussels. And all this *not* during the "Hundred Years' War"; *not* during the Plague or "Fire of London," but within the memory of men not yet old, and when the trumpets of the educationalists were blowing full blast! Were the educationalists capable of recognising merit when made public, they might take the place of those earlier patrons, many of whom did glorious things for literature, until a mean-souled letter from Dr. Johnson killed them. Educationalists, more's the pity, appear incapable of discovering genius. Like crazy gardeners, they neglect the grown rose, whilst wasting fortunes upon manure, for the purpose of broadcasting it over young weeds and nettles!

Neither does the publisher help. He is absolutely commercialised. Perhaps, Sir, you will permit me to express my view of him in a quatrain.

PUBLISHER TO POET

Rush in, Young Man, with *verse*! And for my reading?
Bless me! A most unwarranted proceeding!
You want "fame *now*"—What's that?—And daily *bread*!—
We print the dying, Sir; and pay the dead!

Stroud, Glos.: July 9. KENNETH HARE.

PROSE POEMS

It appears the word poetry is at times in danger of losing its once accepted meaning. In THE POETRY REVIEW of last August I came across a list by Lieut. Richard Garratt of the qualities of a good poem; he sets them down thus: "The art of extracting drama from the ordinary and semi-ordinary luscious brilliance of verbal usage which makes every line a climax unto itself, and behind everything an incidental music which creates an atmosphere which is physical almost as much as intellectual." This seems to me an unsatisfactory statement, and I would not now refer to it did it not bring further to notice what is, to my way of thinking, a mis-conceived notion of what constitutes poetry. In addition, this kind of loose statement does tend to spread in snowball fashion and gathers adherents too ready to accept it. As an instance, M. Edgelow, basing conclusions upon this list of qualities, goes rather out of her way to speak of prose poems in this connection, and to this I will refer in a moment. To resume: apart from the fact that there are beautiful poems with no dramatic content, and that luscious brilliance of verbal usage may be a doubtful adjunct to a poem and is hardly to be counted essential, and that this list leaves out much that might be considered desirable and moreover, contains in its short catalogue a condition with regard to every line which Mr. Garratt has probably not intended or not foreseen, it omits, I suppose inevitably, what indeed is not the most important but at the same time is an essential part of all poetry; I mean that particular expression of language which results in a technique of varying forms, which has in both ancient and modern times made the difference between poetry and prose. It is, I take it, the neglect of this technique which is the origin of the prose poem and which I would say, produces not only a confusion of terms but the hybrid growth that is neither poetry nor prose. There can be no doubt that many writers found, and of course have not ceased to find the untrammelled medium of free verse very much to their liking, and have, from their point of view, good reason to bless the licence which allows any departure from the accustomed ways of genuine poetry, even if that departure leads to entire absence of form, coherence and at times, intelligibility.

Craftsmanship in the art of poetry is to poetry lovers a delight, apart from the actual sentiments and variations of thought and emotion conveyed in the written word. It has become customary in some quarters to ignore niceties of language and to dis-

parage expression conveyed in anything approaching a formal technique. As a consequence, we find writers studiously avoiding any attempt to maintain metre or sustained rhythm or harmonious sequence of phrasing or even consecutive idea, but often, as though impelled by a discarded influence, resorting to more or less haphazard presentment of disjointed lines and in some cases, interpolating unwieldy rhymes among their prose. While it is natural in changed times, under new conditions, to seek for new modes of expression, is it inevitable that existing methods should be entirely overthrown ? A great poet, much berated among minor verse makers and hasty critics of to-day, wrote, what seems to apply to many conditions of our time, "The old order changeth and giveth place to new," this might be read to-day as "giveth place to chaos."

I am making no attempt to uphold adherence to old forms of verse. Now, so many fail to achieve originality, and frustrated cry out against any approximation to the old, we may call to mind that progress does not solely consist in destroying all that has gone before. It may be that every age sends forth its own poetical expression. A poet of the past wrote, "A warlike, various and a tragical age is best to write of, but worst to write in."

It may also be that this time suffers poetically from other disadvantages : how far our present-day poets will carry the standard of verse into fresh fields is yet to be seen, but the ultimate outcome will be interesting. I think it certain that many poets, and readers who are not writers of poetry, do esteem craftsmanship in the art of writing poetry ; even rhyme (which some of the moderns, snatching authority from Milton and forgetting that he, too, made use of it when he thought fit, avowedly despise), which I have not hitherto referred to, gives value to certain poems which would suffer by its absence. Byron, for example, wrote thousands of rhymed lines which can hardly be counted as detrimental, and how many remembered lyrics one may recall which owe much of their charm to the same cause.

Following the quotation I have previously made from Richard Garratt, this occurs, "I came across . . . . a volume by Eric Linklater, entitled *Cornerstones* (Macmillan), which offers, to my mind, a most effective prose poem solution . . . . the major part need not concern us . . . . it has no poetic content," he then refers to a passage at the end, and says, "this might so easily be a series of journalistic, photographic notes." To this I agree. He continues : "it contains such a quality of feeling, emotional and inside war association as to render it, from my point of view, Spender proof. As a prose poem it is supreme for its wealth of beautiful verbal combinations, a zest of poetic description and a serenity of dignity and power which make it very close to the sublime." He goes on to quote from the passage referred to, of which I give a short extract below.

Now, rightly or wrongly, I do not consider this can properly be described as poetry. Sentiments in palpable prose, no matter how beautiful they may be, and how vivid, dignified or emotional, must be considered as prose and not poetry ; fine prose if you will, nearing the sublime if you like, but prose. Why indeed deprive, as it were, prose of its just due ; why not praise it for what it is, why call it something else ?

You do not make a poem by incorporating in prose any amount of "wealth of beautiful verbal combinations." That is how the matter looks to me and I expect quite a number of people will not agree with me.

Let us follow Mr. Garratt's argument a little further. I here take one sentence from the passage already spoken of. It may not be the sentence Mr. Garratt would have preferred but what I say of it applies generally. "In silence, behind the German lines, in a forest of cinder trees and mast of ashes, a gaunt patrol of partisans" : he proceeds to put it into verse thus :

In silence, behind
The German lines
In a forest of cinder trees
And mast of ashes
A gaunt patrol of partisans.

Now, in this arrangement of counted syllables each line does contain the measure of some recognised metre in as far as counting goes: judged by his own definition of requisite qualities it does not appear to meet even his standard of what constitutes a poem. This can hardly be called "luscious brilliance of verbal usage," nor is "every line a climax unto itself"; and if there is music behind this it is scarcely to be classed as physical. Why treat good prose in this way and hope to transform it into poetry? "Perhaps abrupt," he comments; "perhaps, in some ways, lacking in the musical smoothness of verse—a piece of prose, written for prose and with no other motif"—and with this I agree.

Would it not be better if writers once for all recognised that prose is prose and poetry not prose; no one wishes to see poetry "tied in poetic convention," or that its scope should be limited, nor would an individual opinion such as Mr. Garratt puts forward here, be likely to do much harm, but when it appears in the full daylight of print, enthusiastic people, perhaps on a momentary impulse, are sometimes apt to accord it a value it does not possess.

In the Nov.-Dec. number of this REVIEW appeared an article by M. Edgelow, in which it seems she takes this list of Mr. Garratt's as sufficiently complete to justify acceptance; she therefore proceeds to quote prose passages from the work of Mr. S. Sitwell and presents this conclusion: "There can be no difference between many of the prose passages"—in the work—"and actual poems, for they have all these qualities."

I do not doubt they have these qualities; doubtless also they have far more value and power of pleasing than much verse written under the heading of poetry, but why not give them their proper appraisement and call them the prose which they are?

The term prose is not derogatory, why indeed compare, except in a general way, two variants of language which are not subject to identical conditions; in any case, why seek to amalgamate two forms of art which are essentially different?

Thetford RAYMUND BOURNE.

P.S.—Perhaps, Mr. Editor, you will allow me a very small additional space to reply to Mr. Peter Raily's protest against my statement that poetry cannot break through the structure of language. May I remind him that language is the only medium by which poetry can be expressed and the cessation of the language must be the end of the poetry. To speak of "thought scorching through the folds of expression," implies the destruction of this sole medium, and therefore, to speak of "naked poetry" apart from the language which makes it, is rhetorical absurdity.—R.B.

ENGLISH POETRY IN S. AMERICA

SIR E. MILLINGTON DRAKE, who was British Minister at Monte Video at the time of the *Graf Spee* incident, writes from Buenos Aires, 9th July, 1943, to the Director:

"It was a pleasure to receive your circular letter of May, 1943, reporting the general successful progress of The Poetry Society, and I write to congratulate you and your colleagues on the same, remembering, with pleasure, the presence of a good many of them at the readings of Latin-American poetry in translation which I gave at the beginning of April last year before leaving to take up my post as Chief Representative of the British Council in Spanish-speaking America. I was much honoured at being subsequently elected a Vice-President of the Society. As a practical proof of my

belief in the value of making known English poetry, not only in the United Kingdom, but abroad, I send a contribution of ten guineas.

Furthermore, I am encouraged by receiving your letter to write to let the Council know, as I have been on the point of doing on one or two occasions, of the remarkable reception which English poetry receives from the public in Latin-American countries, thanks to the excellent translations of prominent Latin-American literary men. I gave readings with suitable explanations of passages from Shakespeare, Milton, Gray, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Tennyson and Kipling with astonishing success, not only in Latin-American capitals as different in character as Mexico, Guatemala, Salvador, Bogotà, Quito, Lima and La Paz, but also, since I settled down with Buenos Aires as my headquarters, in the big provincial cities of Argentina, which are almost like minor South American capitals.

Also, I gave some readings at a gathering of intellectuals when I went over to Chile to represent Oxford and London Universities at the Centenary of Santiago University. Though there have been appreciative articles in the press on all these occasions, they have rarely been written by people with a real knowledge of poetry, but in Santiago there was an exception, and embarrassingly appreciative as it is as regards the interpretation as well as the poems themselves, I venture to send you a translation of the article. As on all occasions towards the end of the readings I gave as a "homage to the poetry of the country" a few selections from local poems, with an apology for the deficiencies of my pronunciation in regard to these originals, and this, of course, is very much appreciated. On the occasion in question to a really select audience I gave more of these than usual.

So that I am learning a lot more South American poems, and hope, when back in London, to give an even more interesting lecture on the subject, as there is no doubt that they excel in poetry compared with other branches of literature, and also no doubt as to its popularity with the public.

Naturally, this is but one side of my work in these countries, which represents all the manifold activities of the British Council—from scholarships to sport—but there is no doubt that it is one of the most effective. The whole idea of a Cultural Mission, which implies: (*a*) recognition that they have themselves culture, and (*b*) that they are able to appreciate English culture, is wonderfully well received; indeed, I might almost say that the warmth of my welcome varies inversely with the degree of culture of the places visited!

Before closing I must congratulate you again on the success of the Society's work, notwithstanding the practical difficulties in war-time England, which have no doubt got more so since I left.

Since writing the above I have received the March-April number of THE POETRY REVIEW, which I am very glad to have, especially as I had been anxious to obtain some such poems and especially dealing with the war, as I may be able to use them for translation or reading in English to audiences who know enough English. These appear to me of a very high standard. Naturally, as an old Oxford man I much appreciated "A Distant Prospect of Oxford"; but *all* the contents of the REVIEW were of interest to me."

Your contributor to Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, on page 34, remarks that T. S. Eliot, in "Little Gidding," coins the adjective "Behovely" and then complains that it is printed with a capital letter. May I refer him to the work of Juliana of Norwich—from which it is a quotation—"The Fourteen Revelations of Divine Love." He will also recognise the phrase—"All shall be well."

Ventnor. ROSS WILSON.

THE POETS' FELLOWSHIP

THE PREMIUM EDITOR'S REPORT

The verse submitted this time is of an almost universally higher standard than that submitted in April, and the lists are consequently longer. Nevertheless, there is still a deal of untidy thinking, and the majority of the verse does not rise above the level of ordinariness. A little against our better judgement we have given commendation to several entrants for good versification rather than for poetry: but it is hard to find even near-perfection, and we have, on the other hand, commended some indifferent versification because of the poetry that shines through.

One sometimes wonders if many of those who send in entries time after time ever stop to give real thought to what is meant by poetry. One feels little *inevitableness* in most of the verses. Skilled versification is not enough: a poem does not come by thought alone. It is no use saying "I will make a poem about this thing" unless the poem is forced into utterance by sheer weight of sincere feeling. Mind, body, and spirit must unite for the making of a poem; vision must be cleared of the veils of affectation and pretension; heart and eye must return to the simplicity of childhood which sees ever the marvellous in the simple. Sir Thomas Aquinas' definition of the three virtues that constitute beauty may well be applied to poetry, namely, "*Radiance* (because the mind likes light and intelligibility), *Proportion* (because the mind likes order), and *Integrity* (because the mind likes perfection or wholeness)."

Some of the poems receiving higher commendation are war poems, mirroring the times, but PHOEBE RAYNER's "The Spotted Fawn" is a timeless, lovely thing, utterly away from wars and rumours of wars. FRANCES PRITCHARD's (Bournemouth) little poem shares the award because of its moment of inspired perception, giving the lie to avarice and over-prudence, and timidity of heart.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Margaret Gregson, Enton Green;
Redcliffe McKie, Brighton;
Helen Douglas Robinson, N. Carolina;
Marjorie Tilden, Dulwich;
D. E. C. Tomlin, Dunstable;
Hamilton Tovey, P.O.W., Italy.

COMMENDED.

Vere Arnot, Walton-on-Thames;
T. E. Casson, Ulverston;
Wilfred Castle, Broxbourne;
Ann Cooke, Chislehurst;
R. G. Duff, Teignmouth;
Amory Leggatt, W.3;
J. M. Lloyd, Hassocks;
Editha Melbourne, Maidstone;
J. M. Mills, Ware;
Diana Momber, W.R.N.S.;
Juanita Peirse, London;
Rev. T. Pittaway, Frome;
Harry Sefton, Lytham;
Bertha M. Skeat, Sedburgh;
Muriel Symmons, Salcombe;
Ruth Tenney, Los Angeles;
Dorothy Trail, Vancouver;
J. Urquhart, Hampstead;
A. M. Walker, Ormskirk;
Ronald Westbrook, Maidstone.

An ANSWER TO KENNETH HOPKIN'S POEM (in *John O'London's*) "O Love No Transient Things" from FRANCES PRITCHARD (Bournemouth):

O Love all transient things,
Despite their tears,
For 'twas men's love
Made Deidre's beauty live
Through long dead years;
And only in our mind
Does a bird's trackless flight
Leave a shining path behind;

And memory
Is a vast temple, full of love-lit shrines,
For beauty transitory.

"I WAS A POET: I WAS YOUNG"

Readers of THE POETRY REVIEW may remember a graceful lyric, "In Luminas Oras," by James Blyth, in the March-April, 1942, number. Only a few months later the author, having just joined the Merchant Navy and returned from his first short voyage, was killed in a tragic accident, aged only seventeen. He left behind him a collection of MSS., poems, essays, criticisms, which, though often unfinished, as might be expected in so young a writer, show a promise and richness of imagination that might have matured into something great. In his letters his enthusiasm and single-minded devotion to poetry point to a real vocation. He seemed already to have dedicated his life to literature. "I treasure my writings above everything I possess," he wrote. In view of his early death there seems an almost prophetic inspiration in some of his verses:

I'll dance with cherubs; life will be
An endless tapestry of dreams.
I'll swim down golden sunlight streams
And slip into a sunset sea.

So through a sea of sadness, salted sorrow,
A pathless wood of love and life and pain,
I see a friendly beacon burning bright.
There glows the dawning of an eternal morrow.

A devout Catholic, many of his poems have a religious tone:

O Mother of the Word-made-Man, I cry
To thee from out this vale of bitter tears,
Break off this chain of earth's sad, sinful years.
You, by your Son's nail-pierced hand divine
Will change my weaker water into wine.

Two long prose poems touch on depths of thought that hardly lend themselves to quotation, but are full also of vivid impressions of a journey from India (taken when the writer can only have been about twelve years old):

Look over at the western sky;
There fly the daylight's colours at half-mast.
The worst part of the journey is past;
At last we are near Bombay;
Two hours, the sun-flag flies its colours lower:
At evening we glide into the lamplit
Station of Sholapore, where the bats flit
In the twilit air, skimming pools of light,
Diving into darkness.
There are moments in the evening when the moon
Is sinking slowly in a sea of clouds, and the wind
Whispers its knell. And the stars float like its wreckage.
. . . . . These are the moments
Of Time's exquisite leakage, when we seek to hold
Eternity like water in a shell, and cannot speak,
But hear a distant bell, on the sea-stretches faintly rocking,
Deeply tell of things we never here can understand.

And slowly with the golden light
Swung forth the Day's great caravan ;
And starting from the land of night,
Towards another night it ran.

Already the sound of the sea haunts him :

Let us hear in cowrie-shells the distant roar
Of the deep lost voices of the rebellious seas,
The vast orchestral voice of concentrated centuries.
On deck I heard only
The chaste and inviolate,
Stainless, immaculate,
Deep, inarticulate
Sea-song so lonely.

In spite of the high seriousness of most of his verse he had a fund of dry humour (that gift so necessary in the equipment of a poet, who, lacking it, may slip so perilously into bathos), which shows itself in a collection of clever satires and parodies. He was an omnivorous reader. In a letter he wrote :

"In my last summer term at school I was reading anything from two to four books a day ; a very good way of finding what books are worth while ; they remain like drift-wood in the memory after the tide of reading matter has ebbed."

"Heaven has a library more inclusive than the British Museum, while Hell has no library."

"I always carry Macbeth and King Lear when travelling, even if only for a few days."

His taste was wide, comprising books of different periods and nationalities—Dostievsky, Tolstoy, Ibsen, Flaubert, Jane Austen, among others ; the modern poets as well as those of past generations.

"The Nineties, a pet period of mine—I am sure it will have a longer artistic life than most."

"Humbert Wolfe reminds me terribly of Heine, whom I also love (I scraped up enough German to read his stuff), exquisite, lyrical and witty. Both are right in making tears and laughter mingle at the source—they do, I think . . . Their poetry like delicate roses, with not a few thorns hidden beneath the drooping petals."

"Christina Rossetti, willowy, pale, shimmering, delicate—the Corot of poetry in a way."

"Flecker's 'Linnet,' exquisite and trembling lyricism."

"I admire intensely Elliot's latest works, *A Song for Simeon*, the ending of which is very mighty."

" 'Ragnarok' (Alfred Noyes) was not only a poem but an event ; one of the great poems of the century."

"Yes, I think we all try to find 'the one beauty' (John Masefield's poem) which is, I suppose, really the resting place of the soul. I don't suppose anyone finds it till after they have left this world. The search for the Holy Grail . . . and similar stories, are all symbols of the same search for the all-abiding beauty . . . Still I hope to find it at last . . . the only thing worth finding, anything else is but a means to this end."

R. I. P.

EVA DOBELL.

Title page and Index, Vol. XXXIII, will be supplied with the next issue of THE POETRY REVIEW to readers who send 6d. for a copy to the General Secretary ; in present circumstances it cannot be supplied automatically.

LAURENCE BINYON

Mr. Desmond McCarthy presided over the Laurence Binyon Commemoration meeting in place of Mr. T. Sturge Moore, who was in ill-health, but was able to attend the meeting. The Chairman read the following tribute by Mr. Sturge Moore: "Laurence Binyon was a poet and a scholar and one of the soundest and weightiest experts in art appreciation of our time. He was cautious and central, without being pedantic, and could enjoy an opponent's wrongheadedness. He had a personal love for the works and artists about whom he wrote most, and did not pretend to hold the balance so even as to exclude his innate predilections, though his studies often gave perspective to his opinions. The art scholar is apt to clog appreciation with knowledge, but for Binyon knowledge never set solid, it always remained malleable and left a proper freedom for further study. His poetry is always sincere and deeply experienced. Perhaps he more often attained felicity of movement than expression, but he certainly is one of the most inspired poets of his period. He was a perfect friend to me, my debt to him is immense."

Mr. George Rostrevor Hamilton followed with the following apt appreciation: "This meeting is described as a Commemoration. When a poet dies we remember the man and we mourn him. We mourn him especially if he is so gentle and courageous a man, so courteous and idealistic, as Laurence Binyon. But what of his works, his poetry? They are not like the deeds of a statesman, a man of action, which are fixed in the past and have become a part of history. True, they were written in this year or that. They may even relate to a particular period, like Binyon's poems of the last war. But a poem has an inner life of its own, quite separate: once written, it is thenceforward unaffected by the life or death of the poet.

"Some poems die or languish before the poet's death; some survive him and are still youthful, with a continuous life before them, lasting—who knows how long? Some again may seem to have died, but after fifty years, hundred years, are destined to rise again from their ashes like the Phoenix—that "self-begotten bird," in the phrase of Milton. And so, if we try to sum up the achievement of Binyon—as we would that of a dead statesman—the living poems are there to mock us. Binyon, writing about his Collected Poems, observed 'how idle it is to forestall the inscrutable choosings of Time . . . . what is born to wither will fade sure enough . . . what has in it seeds of life will survive the frostiest patronage.'

"At this Commemoration, then, we do two things. We remember with honour the dead, and we also celebrate the living, the poems that survive and are present with us, that are exempt from the poet's mortality and are so unaware of his death that they do not mourn. 'The inscrutable choosings of Time'—the present occasion is only a moment in Time, and the choosing will go on into the future. Aware of this, I would speak only tentatively of Binyon's work: I would wish to speak with candid critical admiration, certainly not with 'frosty patronage.' He was a true poet. He had a style, belonging to old tradition, which has a certain loftiness, a ceremony, a formality, out of key with the artful—and often artificial—undress of to-day. This is one reason which narrows his appeal to a present-day audience. But we must remember two things. The prevailing tone of poetry to-day will not last for ever—indeed, it is visibly changing. Secondly, Binyon was an utterly sincere writer. He had a nobility of mind in natural accord with the old tradition. When he is at his best, and also when we are properly receptive (for the failure of a poem may be not his fault, but ours) we feel the nobility penetrating and informing his imagination and uplifting ours.

"Binyon was an idealist. His idealism, as expressed in his lyrical work, had, I think, a certain weakness at times, a tendency to be somewhat vague. But if I am right, he had virtues which went far to correct this failing. In particular, he had a

most sensitive artistic eye, which contributed form and actuality to his work. Had I time I should like to read to you the whole of an early poem "The Fire" (from *London Visions*). Fire, in itself and as a symbol, seems to have held a peculiar fascination for him, which continued down to his latest work. I must content myself with two brief extracts. Here is the first—he is standing among the crowd who watch :

How to the throbbing glare their hearts reply,
As tossing upward a dim-sparkled plume,
The beautiful swift Fury scares the sky.
The stars look changed on high,
And red the steeples waver from the gloom.
Distantly clear over the water swells
The roar : the iron stanchions dribble bright,
And faltering with strong quiver to its fall,
Drops, slowly rushing, the great outer wall.
From lip to lip a wondering murmur goes,
As crouching a dark moment o'er its prey,
Swiftly again upleaps
The wild flame, and exulting madly glows ;
The city burns in an enchanted day.

And here is the splendid close, which seems to me a high example of the grand style :

Is it that even now
In all, O radiant Desolation, thou
Far off prefigurest
To each obscurely wounded breast
The dream of what shall be ?
And in their hearts they see
Rushing in ardent ruin out of sight
With all her splendour, with her streaming robe
Of seas, and her pale peoples, the vast globe
A sullen ember crumble into night !

"The impact of the last war was an external factor which added strength, and—as I say—actuality, to his work. He was not afraid of heroics, and was the better able to celebrate heroism. Do you remember, for example, 'The Healers'—the healers on the battlefield—with its fine opening stanzas :

In a vision of the night I saw them,
In the battles of the night.
'Mid the roar and the reeling shadows of blood
They were moving like light,
Light of the reason, guarded
Tense within the will,
As a lantern under a tossing of boughs
Burns steady and still.

A fresh quality came into his work which was to endure. Here from his 1918 volume, *The New World,* is one of his loveliest lyrics, 'Morn like a Thousand Shining Spears.'

"In the period between the wars—the period of debunking and of arrogant new fashions—Binyon remained true to himself."

Mr. Hamilton concluded by reading some quiet and beautiful lines which were among the last poems he wrote, "Winter Sunrise."

Mr. Ranjee Shahani contributed a fervent tribute to Mr. Binyon as man and artist and friend of India, and complementary readings were given by Mr. Henry Ainley, Miss Dorothy Dayus and Mr. E. Guy Pertwee.

THE READING OF POETRY

Mrs. Lambert Lack, when awarding the annual Rawnsley Gold Medal for the Reading of Poetry to Miss Catherine Piercy of Swanage, said: "The poems chosen by the competitors showed appreciation and literary taste. I was perhaps a little disappointed at not hearing something of Milton or Keats. Both these poets read magnificently if the reader is the happy possessor of a good voice. However, I must not be captious as I have had a most interesting and enjoyable hour listening to some fine poetry, finely rendered.

"Thanks to The Poetry Society and the Oxford Verse Speaking Festivals we now know how poetry should be rendered. I am indeed grateful to those poets whose criticisms I have heard here in London and at Oxford."

Three examples of verse speaking were to be avoided, those of Miss Mona Wail, Miss Chatty Style, Miss Ella Cushion, Mrs. Lack continued. "A poem should not be *acted* even when it is a dramatic poem. This does not mean that you have to speak a dramatic poem without any sense of drama. Elroy Flecker's directions were admirable: 'They shall read with dignity, with realisation of the beauty of each word, and how in each verse, each word has its value, not only of sense, but of sound and association; they shall mark the metre subtly and not grossly; and all this may be taught to the wise.' I am sure you all agree with this advice. When studying a poem see to it that you approach it with a sense of humility. You must sink yourself entirely, and try to discover what the poet has put into the poem, and let this be your guide as to what you get out of it. Realise that rhythm, metre and rhyme are the guides to the poet's intention, and that you must never be tempted to neglect these. Above all, remember that the *sound* of a poem is part of its meaning, and, as another poet has told us, 'needs a vocal cultivation for its revealing that shall be as exacting as a great singer's'."

ADVICE ON THE SPEAKING OF POETRY

Mr. Donald Wolfit, in awarding the annual Lady Margaret Gold Medal on July 23rd to Miss Mary Biddulph, placing Miss Mary Jameson *proxime accessit*, said: "Adjudicating is the most difficult and confusing thing. It places me in a dilemma, because poetry has such a musical value and the joy of speaking poetry is really an award in itself for everyone who is doing it. It has been a most agreeable and lovely hour." Commenting on individual performances, Mr. Wolfit remarked: "I felt that a change of tone would have helped Miss Pritchett. It was set on too level a quality. You want to be rather careful with the downward inflection. It is devitalizing in its effect. There is the word 'rush.' Browning uses words of this quality frequently, words that sweep through the lines. He gets those words that just take you along. Browning had fires as well as sadness, triumph and fervour. He inspired Elizabeth. Miss Pritchett's second poem, which has the 'elegant' title 'I invented death,' takes the breath of the audience away by the title alone. This poem, by Humbert Wolfe, contains some of the most amazing lines of modern poetry.

"Miss Biddulph's recital moved me very much indeed (Wordsworth's 'Intimations'), I would suggest that you have a quality which is somewhat rare in the speaking of verse. It is a gift of speaking the meaning so clearly. You should augment your speed. Don't think that the audience will lag behind. The speaker should not hesitate and for that it is essential that the words of the poem come out of the speaker's mind. If you get out of breath, recover your breath and let the audience recover its breath.

"Mr. Burbury's chosen poem, 'Love Unknown,' is a most interesting experiment. The author belonging to the Elisabethan period wants reciting to Elisabethan speed that is quicker than ordinary speed.

"I was delighted by the lovely and sensitive tone of Miss Jameson. I think that

she has a real understanding of the sense of poetry, with a fine sense of rhythm. The pronunciation of 'again' is improved by using the lengthened way of pronouncing.

"Miss Cohen had the best pace of all the candidates, but for a little tremolo. This tremolo comes from one's fear to overfill the room with one's voice. You must let yourself go in the opening. If you recite Milton, his vitality simply pours through you. It is the same with Browning, but not with Longfellow. As for the second poem, 'Summertime on Bredon,' by A. E. Housman, it must open with the gaiety and not with sadness. The awful pause must be brought so as to catch your audience unawares. And let the music go through. Never forget the turmoil in the poet's mind when he evolves his wonderful string of words. There is always turmoil and searching in a poet's mind before bringing his words alive. The writer is offering a prayer to God and it is up to you to submit something of the poet's experience. It is thus that the reciter can keep this glorious language of ours alive."

POETRY AND MUSIC

Mr. Stanley Roper, C.V.O., Principal of Trinity College of Music and organist of the Chapel Royal, who presided at the recital of poetry in music arranged by Miss Marjorie Lyon and Miss Nonnie Taylor, mentioned some interesting things about the resemblances and diversities of the appeal of the two arts. The Greeks regarded music almost exclusively as a mere branch of literature: they considered it to be a part of the poet's training to be able to set his own verses to music. Hesiod was excluded from taking part in pythic contests because he had not learnt to accompany himself on the kithara, and Euripides was severely censured for having entrusted the composition of the musical part of his dramas to another poet. So, in the eyes of the Greeks, music was—to use their own expression—merely a "seasoning" of poetry. A similar view prevailed during the age of the Trouvères and the Minnesinger—which found its way to England, for it is the fact that several of my predecessors at the Chapel Royal were actually ποιητής in the Greek sense of the term: men like Cornish, Edwards and Campian, who were at least as much at home in *writing* verse as in setting it to music.

It was not until the middle of the sixteenth century that music in England began to be acknowledged as an art which might have a separate existence apart from literature —a development which had so far been regarded as a symptom of décadence, as no doubt it was from the Greek point of view. In the oft-quoted lines of Richard Barnfield, "If music and sweet poetry agree, as they must needs, we find a sure foundation for that comparison between Dowland and Spenser, which to many of us at the present day sounds remote and unfamiliar.

At about the same time we see Shakespeare combining with Morley; a generation later Lawes with Milton: the sphere-born harmonious sisters now singing, as it were, "both in one key." So, for the space of some hundred and forty years our music and our poetry were on high terms of mutual regard. But this happy relationship was not to last. For although Dryden, who comes at the end of the period, collaborated with Purcell an estrangement was already beginning, which not only continued but developed through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. So music gradually faded away from the works of our English poets. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, are outside its influence; Shelley shows no comprehension of it; Byron has little to show except songs that he wrote for Braham; Keats has virtually nothing. Indeed, of all poets since Milton, our immediately past Laureate is the only one whose understanding of music is complete and accurate. At the beginning of this period Addison complained that "music renders us incapable of hearing sense," and towards its end Miss Austen, in *Persuasion*, devoted a chapter to a concert without mentioning the music.

It was almost inevitable as music developed in scope and complexity and composers began to discover a kingdom of sonata, quartet, concerto and symphony, into which the collaboration of the poet was not invited, the poets should come to look upon music with impatience, and yet it is worth while to notice that the two arts have common ground, which places them at once in direct antithesis to painting and sculpture and architectural design. They are essentially *temporal* arts, depending for their apprehension on a fixed and determinate succession. We may see the comparison of a picture as a whole: we can study its detail from R to L or from L to R, upwards or downwards, as we choose, but with a melody or sentence all this is impossible: the experience is not complete, is not even fully intelligible until the *last word* or the *last note;* and the order of recurrence is irreversible. Secondly, whereas the dull speaker, dull poet, dull musician, either lets his point be anticipated or buries it in anti-climax, the real artist in words or notes keeps the real issue in reserve, so that it strikes the more keenly because the blow has been withheld. Another likeness may be noted in which the effect is produced by *contrast*. The poet and musician may alike gloom through dark minor keys, and then, in the space of a crotchet, change from minor to major, like a shaft of sunlight through an unbarred window. Other points of likeness may be noted, tone and rhythm are in music and poetry vital and essential realities. In both of these music would seem to have the advantage. On the other side there can be no doubt that poetry is far more precise and direct than music. For instance, music can suggest but it cannot narrate. A final point of resemblance between poetry and music is that they are specially liable to the same diseases. There are two maladies which attack the temporal arts with particular virulence, usually at the end of some period of conspicuous achievement. The first of these is anarchy: the claim of a personal freedom, which means flat defiance of all law and all regulation. For the most part it belongs to the recklessness of youth and deserves our cordial sympathy, but it is no more a form of art than window-breaking is a form of archery. This is the more vexing because a great deal of first-class work is being done in both arts—work of genius and accomplished skill.

A worse fault is pedantry, the fault of those who are so over-weighted with learning that they lose all sense of proportion in employing it. There are dozens of parallel instances in music and poetry. There is no time left for reference to other factors like syncopation and parallel instances of those points already discussed—in France and Germany.

It seems to me that there are two general principles of criticism which may help to guide our judgment of *all* arts, and especially, perhaps, of the two with which we have been dealing this afternoon. One is that the continuity of human history and human civilisation is *not* broken but *fulfilled* by the *advent* of genius. There were musicians before Bach, dramatists before Shakespeare, ballad-makers before Homer himself, each leader is the follower of a past tradition and by his own genius turns it to fresh account. The other principle, on which one cannot too often lay stress, is that every art has its natural medium, and every medium its natural qualities and limitations. The architect does not apply the same design to wood and brick and marble; and we all know what Whistler thought of the critic whose praise of a water-colour was that he might have taken it for an oil-painting.

And so between the sister arts of music and poetry the points of resemblance do not exclude but invite the points of difference. As Sir H. Hadow has well said, "Poetry transfigures the world of experience; music stands apart from it: in the form of their presentation they are akin, in the substance of that which is presented they are separate. In supreme moments they stand close together upon the summit, but they climb to it from different sides, and if either takes the path of the other it will lose its way."